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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

MARCH 2005

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Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

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## Traditional Wisdom



APRAMĀDA: VIGILANCE

तमस्त्वज्ञानजं विद्धि मोहनं सर्वदेहिनाम् ।  
प्रमादालस्यनिद्राभिस्तन्निबध्नाति भारत ॥

On the other hand, know *tamas*, which deludes all embodied beings, to be born of ignorance. O scion of the Bharata dynasty, it binds through inadvertence, laziness and sleep. (Bhagavadgita, 14.8)

प्रमादं वै मृत्युमहं ब्रवीमि तथाऽप्रमादममृतत्वं ब्रवीमि ॥  
प्रमादाद्वै असुराः पराभवन्नप्रमादाद्ब्रह्मभूता भवन्ति ।  
नैव मृत्युर्व्याघ्र इवास्ति जन्तून् ह्यस्य रूपमुपलभ्यते हि ॥

I [Sanatsujata] say, inadvertence is death itself, and mindfulness is immortality. It is due to inadvertence that the asuras were subjugated [by defeat and death], and it is by virtue of vigilance that [the gods] are immortal. It is not death that devours like a tiger, for the nature of death is unfathomable. (*Sanatsujatiya*, 4-5)

लक्ष्यच्युतं चेद्यदि चित्तमीषद् बहिर्मुखं सन्निपतेत्ततस्ततः ।  
प्रमादतः प्रच्युतकेलिकन्दुकः सोपानपङ्क्तौ पतितो यथा तथा ॥

If the mind ever so slightly strays from the ideal and becomes outgoing, then it goes down and down, just as a ball inadvertently dropped on the staircase bounces down from one step to another. (*Vivekachudamani*, 325)

A man must be extremely careful during the early stages of spiritual discipline. ... You see, a man must not sway his body while climbing to the roof; he may fall. (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 604)

Always be careful. A careful person is not subject to grief. Never forget that. *Prarab-dha karma* cannot torment a person who is always alert. (*Spiritual Treasures: Letters of Swami Turiyananda*, 31)

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## ☪ This Month ☪

Bioethics is one of the fastest growing disciplines in applied ethics and cloning of human tissues exemplifies the ethical dilemma that confronts bioethicists. This month's editorial, **Bioethics and Cloning**, examines the scientific facts about cloning and the Vedantic approach to the ethical questions it raises.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** envisages nature as the model for efficient action in 'Hard Work and True Play' by Emily Palmer Cape, then Secretary, Vedanta Society of New York.

Swami Atulanandaji's **Reflections on the Bhagavadgita** takes us through verses 33 to 44 of Chapter Eleven of the Gita. As Sri Krishna reveals to Arjuna the real meaning and implication of His universal form, the latter is gripped by awe and breaks forth into spontaneous adoration, the famous 'Sri Krishna Stuti'. This is the theme of the present instalment.

The transcendent truth of Advaita Vedanta, as expounded by Sri Shankaracharya, lies beyond the realm of action. Swami Vivekananda took the same Advaitic truth as the basis of his philosophy of service and programme for Indian rejuvenation. In **Vedanta in Practice** Srmat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj provides deep insights into the resolution of this paradox. In this issue, the first part of this illuminating discourse examines the behaviour of the siddhas and jivanmuktas and the Upanishadic upasanas based on the pervasiveness of Brahman as keys to the practice of Advaita.

In the second part of **Bioethics for Science and Technology: A Hindu Perspective**, his presentation before the International Bioethics Committee at the UNESCO head-

quarters in Paris, Swami Jitatmanandaji discusses the Indian view of human evolution based on conscious choice, the need to look deeper than genes to understand true human potential, and the specifics of the Hindu view on medical ethics.

The year-long celebrations, in India and abroad, to mark **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th Birth Anniversary**, concluded last January with a three-day programme at Belur Math. Swami Satyamayanandaji of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, presents a colourful report.

**Sri Ramakrishna—The World Teacher** is Smt Sudesh's offering on the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's 169th birth anniversary. Tailoring one's message to the needs of the individual, personifying of the ideal of householders as well as monks, and helping the erratic and the unruly to progress on the path of spirituality, are some of the distinctive features of Sri Ramakrishna the teacher. These the author, a devotee from Ambala, has brought into focus.

**Paving the Path for Dhyana** is an insightful analysis by Swami Satyamayanandaji of some of the basic physiological and psychological issues pertaining to posture and the preliminary processes involved in meditation.

The eighth instalment of **Parabrahma Upaniṣad**, translated by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur, continues the analogy of the *yajñopavita* as a symbol of Brahman.

This month's **Glimpses of Holy Lives** continues with the inspiring rendition of Mathuradasji's remarkable personality.

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# Bioethics and Cloning

## EDITORIAL

### The Evolution of Ethics

**E**thical issues have been confronting humans since prehistoric times. Social life is dependent on internal regulation. Restraint and reciprocity are unavoidable exigencies of social living. A pack of wolves will end its internecine fight once one of them displays submissive behaviour while the same pack tears apart any other animal that happens to stray into its territory. In a herd of elephants moving in search of fresh vegetation, if a calf happens to fall back or stray away, the herd will return, trace the straggler and take it along. If the latter happens to have injured itself, it will be nursed and helped till it can again move with the group. Monkeys helping delouse each other is not an unfamiliar sight. Crow-watchers would have come across a court of crows crowing down or pecking a recalcitrant member into submission. All these acts contain rudiments of what in humans is highly complex ethical behaviour.

Issues in ethical philosophy as well as normative and applied ethics had engaged thinkers in many an ancient civilization. The concepts of dharma and *ṛta* as found in the early Vedic texts and elaborated later in the Upanishads, Brahmanas, Smritis, and Puranas comprise the oldest comprehensive philosophy of ethics. The *Ashtanga Magga* of Gautama Buddha, the moral imperatives of the Jaina tirthankaras, the Tao of simple and wise living, the 'superior-man' of correct behaviour as envisaged by Confucius, and the moral speculations of the ancient Greek philosophers—from Pythagoras to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle—all contain sophisticated ethical concepts that form the basis of much of modern ethical thought.

The subsequent centuries saw the growth

of two distinct strands of ethical thinking: one connected with specific religions—the legalistic traditions of Jewish ethics based on the Old Testament and Islamic ethics derived from the Quran, the moral theology of the Christian Church, the *acharas* of Sanatana Dharma guided by the Dharmashastras, and so on; the other strand obtained from the works of free thinkers in post-Renaissance Europe. The major themes underpinning ethical discussions undertaken by both these strands have included the following questions: Why should we be moral? What is the source of the moral impulse? Is it natural or prescriptive in origin? Is morality rational or emotive? How does one decide on what is moral? Is moral judgement subjective or are there universal and objective elements to it? That the debate on these issues refuses to die is proof of the paradoxical nature of normative judgement that often impels us to derive the 'ought' (what we should do) from the 'is' (the facts of existence), something that cannot be logically supported, as David Hume pointed out.

Pragmatism characterizes modern man, and the post-modern is marked by ethical relativism. It would therefore appear that abstract theories of ethics would have little practical relevance in today's world, and this is not totally untrue. Yet, there is currently an unprecedented global interest in applied ethics as is evidenced by the various movements for human (and animal) rights and civil liberties, the formation of various 'liberation' groups with their particular philosophies and even theologies, and the multitude of activists—the pacifists, the environmentalists and the like—all of whom have agenda with strong ethical content. In this burgeoning field of applied ethics, bioethics, dealing with the ethical issues

raised by advances in biology and medicine, stands out for its remarkable growth and the number of disciplines that it engages. This growth has been the result of two factors: first, advances in medicine have brought into focus issues at the limits of life—issues relating to prolonging life, euthanasia, non-natural means of conception and abortion, all of which impinge on the sanctity of life, human dignity, right to life and freedom of choice; second, advances in genetic technology, including the complete decoding of the human genome and understanding the biology of embryonic cells with their potential to form any type of tissue, now provide us with the ability to tailor the structure and function of cells, tissues and even entire individuals. This, obviously, has tremendous moral implications. Cloning is one technological advancement that exemplifies these issues, and a brief examination may be worthwhile.

### What is Cloning?

A group of genetically identical cells comprise a clone. All our body cells are genetically uniform and are therefore clones of each other. Organisms reproducing by asexual means like amoebae, bacteria or hydra also give rise to clones—the entire organism being a clone of its parent. The plants that we grow from cuttings in our garden are also clones of the mother plant. In the 1980s scientists learnt to clone mice by transferring the nucleus of an embryonic cell into a mouse ovum from which the nucleus (containing genetic material) had been removed. This fusion cell, when implanted into the mouse uterus, started dividing and led to the formation of a mouse pup with all its genetic material derived from one parental source. In 1997, Ian Wilmut managed to clone an entire sheep—the famous Dolly—by this method of ‘nuclear transfer’. What was novel about Wilmut’s process was that he obtained the nucleus from the udder cell of a donor sheep, and udder cells are terminally differentiated cells, that is, they are

mature tissue cells that were till then thought incapable of taking part in fresh tissue formation. The chemical environment of the ovum apparently ‘tricked’ the genes in the transferred nucleus into behaving like the genetic material of an embryonic cell (called a ‘pluripotent stem cell’ as it can participate in the formation of all types of tissues). This process, called ‘adult somatic cell nuclear transfer’, thus led to the formation of a clone with genetic material derived from a non-reproductive tissue.

This type of cloning, called ‘reproductive cloning’ because it is used for reproductive purposes, raised a furore among ethicists who believed that such methods applied to humans can be badly misused. Popular imagination took this to be ‘playing God’, and popular writers warned of the possibility of planned creation of Frankenstein’s monsters; if one Hitler was enough to ravage the world, what would happen if ten Hitler clones were let loose! Concerns were also raised about the psychological effects on the cloned offspring arising from its artificial birth and its total genetic identity with one parent.

Most of these speculations do not stand up to scientific scrutiny for the simple reason that clones are highly unlikely to show behaviour identical to their parents, for behaviour is heavily influenced by environmental factors. The growth of the human brain is markedly influenced by the type of stimulation it receives in the years after birth and this stimulation keeps moulding the brain in adult life too. So differences in environmental factors will themselves ensure against behavioural identity. Moreover, Hitler was as much a product of history as he was of his genes and his upbringing; and a simultaneous reproduction of all these factors can safely be ruled out. Even identical twins that are natural clones rarely show identical behaviour despite similar upbringing. Nor has their genetic identity been found to cause any adverse psychological effect.

Yet there are hardly any credible scientists who support human reproductive cloning. This is because the process is not only very inefficient but also entails considerable risk. The genetic reprogramming required of the adult nucleus for it to initiate the formation of the embryo is hardly ever as correct as that obtained from normal reproductive tissue; so the cloned animals invariably have some organic defect. Consequently, there is a well-justified, effective global moratorium on human reproductive cloning.

The promise of adult nuclear transfer lies elsewhere, in a process called 'therapeutic cloning'. If after nuclear transfer the developing embryonic cells, instead of being implanted into a womb, are artificially cultured in vitro, they give rise to a clone of embryonic stem cells instead of a foetus. These cells can then be chemically induced to transform themselves into virtually any type of tissue cell which can be reinjected or transplanted into the original donor to correct various deficiencies in tissue function like diabetes or Parkinson's disease. This technology holds out great hope for many incurable conditions and also the promise of more cost-effective therapies.

The moral objections to therapeutic cloning are more fundamental. If human cells and embryos are living entities, can experimentation with these be morally justified? Also, does not the commercialization of these tissues and processes violate human dignity? These questions provide us with an appropriate point of departure for examining the Vedantic view of human life and biological development, for it is this understanding that will help us formulate an answer to these questions.

### The Upanishadic View of Life and Transmigration

An understanding of the Vedantic view of life is essential to an appreciation of its ethical viewpoint. Three ideas are crucial to this understanding: one, individual life, as perceived by the Upanishads, is only one compo-

nent in an intricately interlinked mass of Consciousness that is life; two, our present existence as living subjects is only one of a series of transmigratory existences that we have been having since time immemorial; three, the experiencing and transmigratory subject (jivatman) is distinct from the physical body derived from genetic material contributed by parents.

A description of the process of transmigration is provided by the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Acharya Shankara introduces the matter in the following words: 'Now the question is, when the self loaded with knowledge etc., is about to go to another body, does it leave the old body and go to another, like a bird going to another tree? [*This is the Jaina view.*] Or is it carried by another body serving as a vehicle to the place where, according to its past work, it is to be born? [*This is the view of the devatāvādins.*] Or does it stay here, while its organs become all-pervading and function as such? [*This is the Sankhya view.*] Or is it that so long as it remains in the body, its organs are contracted to the body's limits, but when it dies they become all-pervading—like the light of a lamp when the (enclosing) jar is broken—and contract again when a new body is made? [*This is the Vedantic view.*]<sup>1</sup> The Vedantic view is supported by Upanishadic texts that explicate the pervasive nature of the sense organs (in their subtle form) (*Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.5.13) and their contraction to (or identification with) the limits of specific physical bodies. (*Ibid.*, 1.3.22) The same Upanishad figuratively illustrates the process of transmigration with the example of a moving leech: 'Just as a leech moving on a blade of grass reaches its end, takes hold of another support, and draws itself together towards it, so does the self (jivatman) throw this body aside ... take hold of another support, and draw itself together towards it.' (*Ibid.*, 4.4.3)

This alternate body, however, is not the gross body that the jivatman is finally destined to take up. It is a subtle body, predomi-

nantly aqueous, that must first move through several distinct phases as delineated in the 'panchagni-vidya' sections of the *Chandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanishads*. (*Chandogya*, 5.3-10 and *Brihadaranyaka*, 6.2) Three courses are open to the jivatman: the bright northern course of the gods (*devayana*) for those exclusively devoted to meditation; the darker southern course of the manes (*pitriyana*) for those who have led dharmic lives, performed scriptural rituals and engaged in welfare activities; and the third course for evil-doers that leads to non-human birth, either directly or after hellish experiences. The *devayana* and *pitriyana* are characterized by ascent through various states like the solar and lunar spheres, which are, as Swami Vivekananda explains, 'visions (that) rise in succession before the jiva, who himself neither goes nor comes'.<sup>2</sup> The descent along *pitriyana* is the prototypal descent, marked by identification in succession with clouds, rain, crops, the man eating these crops, and finally with a particular woman at the time of conception. These identities, again, are only abstract concepts and not gross transformations, as Acharya Shankara has clarified in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*.<sup>3</sup>

These concepts may not appear easily intelligible, but they reflect the fact that Consciousness underpins all existence and can manifest in specific forms. This Consciousness is not to be confused with awareness, for the jivatman's identity with rain, plants, and such other stages in its transmigratory path are not marked by awareness.<sup>4</sup> Hence the conceptus in its early embryonic and foetal stages in the mother's womb is not considered a separate individual. Its individuality is established only when the jivatman actually 'enters' it and establishes a psychic identity, for the jivatman is nothing but the transmigrating psychic apparatus comprising the mind and related sense organs in their subtle form. According to the *Garbha Upanishad*, a text that deals with human embryonic development, this entry occurs in the seventh month of foetal life. This

was also the time that the foetus was traditionally considered to take to reach biological viability, or the ability to survive outside the mother's womb. However, with advances in medical technology, foetuses delivered several weeks earlier can now be helped to survive.

This psychic identity associated with viability establishes the individuality of the developing baby. It is then subject to awareness (albeit in rudimentary forms) and the Upanishadic and Puranic texts cite many instances of remarkably heightened awareness of the baby in the womb.

It is important that though viability marks the embodiment of the jivatman, yet the earlier embryonic stages are not considered non-living, for the integrity of cellular and tissue structure is evidence of the presence of active prana (the synonym for 'life'). At this early stage, however, the prana is dependent on maternal support.<sup>5</sup> This distinction between life and its supporting Consciousness is indicated by Yajnavalkya during one of the debates in King Janaka's court when he asks his interlocutors, 'If a tree, after it is felled, springs forth anew from its root, from what root does a man spring forth after being cut down by death?' and then immediately warns, 'Do not say, "From the seed", for that is produced from a living man.'<sup>6</sup>

### Is Cloning Ethical?

From the above-mentioned facts it may be deduced that any injury to the viable foetus is likely to cause psychic injury to the jivatman and will lead to karmic repercussions. Injury or loss in the earlier embryonic stages are not likely to have these effects, yet the presence of prana demands that even the embryo be treated with respect.

Is experimentation on embryonic tissue then morally wrong? The Vedantic answer to this question depends not so much on the act as on the attitude behind the act. The entire thrust of the Bhagavadgita is on the impor-

tance of attitudes. Devoid of selfish motives and done with the general good in mind even apparently injurious actions have no moral repercussions. Selfish motives can give even seemingly altruistic actions a morally negative charge.

The justification for cloning and related issues of bioethical concern must therefore be sought not in the specifics of these processes, but in the motives that impel us to choose them. It is up to the concerned individuals to be clear about their motives, and for society to exercise control when the motives of its members go astray.

An accurate understanding of the scientific facts is, for sure, necessary to clear misconceptions and prejudices before one can arrive at a sound ethical judgement; but deeper ethical issues may prove more intractable.

International organizations like the UNESCO have been holding wide-ranging consultations to formulate norms and policies to regulate biotechnology. Swami Jitatmanandaji's presentation of the Hindu view of ethics (the concluding portion of which appears in this issue) was a part of this process. There are also strict international legal norms (exemplified by the Nuremberg Code) for conducting biological research. These aim to prevent a repeat of the unethical and inhuman use of men and women as subjects of biological research in Nazi Germany. But there are few instruments to regulate the equitable distribution of the fruits of research.

Therapeutic cloning promises a whole

range of remedies for presently incurable conditions. But whether these will be available to the villages around Mayavati or the bushmen in Africa, and at what cost, is the big question. A free-market economy allows few ethical checks on pricing and availability. In societies where welfare measures are inadequate and budgetary allocations for health insubstantial (as is the case in India), costly and inappropriate technologies can prove a big burden.

The presence of gross socio-economic disparities can, therefore, often render plain biological views of ethics redundant. In fact, under such conditions, 'biological arguments can trivialize ethics and distract our attention from real moral issues: the ways in which the genetic potential of humans born into impoverished environments today is stunted and thwarted'. As Leon Eisenberg of Harvard Medical School has rightly observed, 'had we the moral commitment to provide every child with what we desire for our own, what a flowering of humankind there would be.' ~

## References

1. Shankaracharya's commentary on *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.3.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 103.
3. Shankaracharya's commentary on *Brahma Sutras*, 3.1.22.
4. *Brahma Sutras*, 3.1.24.
5. *Aitareya Upanishad* 2.1.2.
6. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.9.28.4-5.

**T**he goal of all nature is freedom, and freedom is to be attained only by perfect unselfishness; every thought, word, or deed that is unselfish takes us towards the goal, and, as such, is called moral. That definition, you will find, holds good in every religion and every system of ethics.

—Swami Vivekananda

**A**ct only on that maxim (or principle) which you can at the same time will to become a universal law.

—Immanuel Kant

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# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

March 1905

## Hard Work and True Play

**H**ow often the most stupendous work of Dame Nature seems as if it were almost done in the spirit of play; so easily, so without friction do her mighty laws work!

The saying that 'Nature is never at rest, yet always is in repose' strikes many a thoughtful mind. She may be filled with actions, but always calmly and surely she acts. In her most seemingly angry and terrible moments, one is conscious of the ever silent march of her doing. None can thwart, she silently works, yet even then it seems to be but play.

We never feel the frictions of fear in her not being able to accomplish, or the extra expenditure of unneeded force. This very ease and positive way of attaining all her marvellous developments makes us feel it but a smooth effect from a natural cause and like a big play after all.

What a great lesson to each of us if we but translate this thought to our own environments and lives. No matter what the work, no matter how distasteful or difficult, if a man or woman only go about it with the spirit of freedom and power, of alertness and ease, he will find success where he expected defeat. The quality of work lies in the man, not in the kind of work he performs.

Indifference is death. The outer action always bespeaks the inner thoughts, and if one finds [oneself] slovenly, or halting or a non-desire [*sic*] to do the deed to be done, alas, for that soul! It is the heart that keeps us young in spirit. We must love our work, not the work itself but the very doing, the accomplishing of an act well. This when truly learned is a great step forward towards understanding the *real* play of life.

The man or woman who naturally longs to express himself or herself through art, music or painting and finds some strong event causing them to turn every current of their interests and enthusiasms to another direction, may either make or break their future karma by the *hard work* or *true play* they make of it.

A soul who realizes that it is the creation of character which each of us is struggling to gain, and a line of necessary duty or imposed work of *any* description may be turned into a cheerful play, has already climbed a step on the ladder of life's evolution which he will never regret.

We are happy, content, cheery when we play, so if we learn to cause our minds to go quietly, but with vitality and energy, and a true inward desire to calmly succeed, we will soon be laughing to ourselves to feel the intense joy and gladness we have attained, even while working at tasks which otherwise would be irksome and wearing.

Every breath we breathe has a spiritual significance. Every time you lift your hands to work, or your voice to command, be conscious that it is not you, but *You*, who is to make accounts. The law is *spiritual development*, and the earlier we each learn to feel within the sanctuary of our hearts that all action is but as a spiritual chemist, turning the doing, either into hard work or true play, we will learn to comprehend more and more *our* hard work, and turn it into—*God's Play*.

—Emily Palmer Cape

Divine persons are character born, or, to borrow a phrase from Napoleon, they are victory organized.

—Emerson

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# Reflections on the Bhagavadgita

SWAMI ATULANANDA

## Chapter 11 (*continued*)

**33. Therefore do you arise and acquire fame. After conquering the enemies enjoy a prosperous kingdom. Verily by Me have they been already slain; be you merely an instrumental cause, O Savyasachin (Arjuna)!**

**Y**our good karma, Arjuna, entitles you to fame and the enjoyment of a conquering prince. People will highly regard you as the greatest of heroes. And that is right, for such you are. Who else can I address as Savyasachin, one able to shoot arrows even with his left hand? You have made yourself a most proficient warrior and therefore I could select you as My instrument for this great cause. Now be happy. The war will go on anyhow, for My plan must work out. Those who are doomed must perish, if not through you then through someone else. There is no escape for them. Your part in the fight is really very insignificant. You are only a tool in the hand of the master. Remember, I am the real actor; you only appear as such. That privilege I give you. But the war does not depend on you, neither the victory nor the defeat. You cannot save anyone's life; neither can you take it without My consent. And I know the secret of things. I understand the play. I know that there is no death beyond the body. And you need not fear anything. I will tell you a secret. Victory will be yours. Go ahead and fight.

Here is a great lesson. Nothing takes place without God's consent. Whatever is done, wheresoever and by whomsoever, it is all a working out of His plan. The saving of life and the taking of life are included in the Universal Scheme. The man of charity and the robber, the protector of life and the murderer, the saint and the sinner, are all necessary to keep the world-wheel turning. All are engaged in His service and we are all placed where we be-

long. We all fill the place for which we are fit. The cobbler cannot do the carpenter's work; the shoeblick cannot fill the professor's chair. And so it is in the moral sphere. The saint cannot cheat and murder. The rogue cannot live the saintly life. God uses us for that work for which we are fit. We have no choice. Develop your moral and spiritual side and He will use you for moral and spiritual purposes. Rob and lie and cheat and kill, and God will use you where there is a vacancy for the cheat and the robber. The law is just. As on the material plane, so on the mental and spiritual plane. Character counts. We may work for a great and lofty cause or we may slave simply to satisfy our passions.

But if we are all God's workers, what then does it matter what we do? True, it does not matter to those who realize this. But realizing it and not realizing it, that is what matters. The man of realization works in the spirit of freedom; the ignorant man is a tool and a slave. The one works because he loves to serve the master; the other is forced into his place, he cannot escape. To the one life is a joy; to the other it is a burden. To the one life means assisting one dearly beloved to complete a great purpose; to the other it means being driven by the whip of destiny. That makes a great difference.

Arjuna did not realize it; therefore he suffered. When he understood it, all sorrow left him. Ignorance unnerved him. Understanding made him a man. Sri Krishna is convincing him.

**34. Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha and Karna, as well as other brave warriors, them—already killed by Me—do you kill and be not distressed. Fight, and you will conquer your enemies in battle.**

There was good reason for Arjuna to fear his opponents. For some of them were endowed with special powers and celestial weapons and others were considered invincible. Bhishma, for example, had his death at his own will. He had his life under his own control, for there were only certain conditions under which he could be killed. By avoiding these conditions he was safe from all attack. Karna was most formidable in war and Indra, being pleased with him, had given him an unerring missile. That missile was sure to kill the person at whom it was directed. Jayadratha's person, again, was performing severe austeri-

If we can trust in God, if we can always act to please Him, then we will not commit any sin. We may make mistakes from a worldly standpoint, but if our motive is to obey the will of God in all things, then no sin will be held against us. It is the motive that counts with God, not the deed. A truly resigned man may suffer on the material plane, karma may affect him there, but his conscience will always be clear, he will have peace of mind under all conditions. That is the reward of the spiritual man. Storm and stress may blow about him, he may meet success or failure, he may enjoy or suffer, but his heart is firmly fixed in the eternal Spirit and he enjoys a bliss that passes all understanding.

***If we can trust in God, if we can always act to please Him, then we will not commit any sin. ... If our motive is to obey the will of God in all things, then no sin will be held against us. It is the motive that counts with God, not the deed.***

ties in order that whoever killed his son would himself die instantly. And so were there others. Besides, Arjuna had reason to fear that he would commit a great sin by killing Drona and Bhishma. The latter was his grandsire who had always been very kind to him and the former, his greatest teacher in the science of archery. It was Drona who had taught Arjuna all that he knew, who had made him the greatest of all warriors. It is for this reason that Sri Krishna especially mentions these heroes when he tells Arjuna not to feel troubled. Victory will be yours and you will not commit sin by engaging in the fight. Someway or other these men will lose their lives. I have ordained it so.

The worldly man cannot comprehend this. He cannot believe it. But those who have tried and succeeded are firmly convinced that no happiness is greater than the happiness of him who lives a spiritual life. And the spiritual life as taught in the Gita consists in the performance of our duties, fearlessly and unselfishly, with love for God, who is the divine Principle within us, our very inner being, the Soul of our soul, the Life of our life. Live in the world, and as the lily that grows in the water is not moistened by water, so remain free from the contamination of the world, by putting your love and trust in God while working among, and for, His creatures.

Sanjaya again relates to King Dhritarashtra the effect which Sri Krishna's words exercised on Arjuna.

**35. Sanjaya said:**

Having heard these words of Keshava (Krishna), (Arjuna) the diadem-wearer, with folded hands, trembling and prostrating himself, again spoke to Krishna in a choked voice,

**bowing down, overwhelmed with fear.**

**T**here was still a possibility of preventing the battle. Had the king consented to make certain concessions, the other party could have been satisfied. And Sanjaya hoped that on learning that his sons, among others, would be killed, the king might despair of success and that he might bring about peace. But even this the king did not listen to,

owing to mighty Destiny. And the fight was continued.

Arjuna, quite overcome by the words of Sri Krishna, hardly able to speak, trembling and overwhelmed with fear, begins with folded hands his adoration of the Lord in the Universal Form.

**36. Arjuna said:**

**It is meet, O Lord of the senses (Krishna), that the world is delighted and rejoices in Your glory, that rakshasas fly in fear to all quarters and all the hosts of siddhas bow down to You in adoration.**

**O** Lord, You are the Self of all and the Friend of all beings. You are the most beloved and it is right that the world

should rejoice at the sight of Your glory and that all great souls should bow down to You in adoration.

**37. Why should they not bow down to You, O mighty Being, greater than all, the primal cause even of Brahma, O infinite One, O Lord of the gods, O Abode of the universe; for You are the Imperishable, (You are) existence and non-existence and all that is beyond.**

**I**ndeed it is but fit that all should bow down to God, the *mahatma*, the Great Soul of the universe, greater than even the origin of the creator Brahma. Brahma himself is but an instrument in God's hand. He carries out God's plan; he makes perceptible that which in the divine Mind is supersensuous. The eternal world-scheme is carried out by one Brahma after the other. But God is infinite, imperish-

able, beyond the universe, manifest or unmanifest, beyond *sat* and *asat*, because these are only His *upadhis*, His forms, His mediums of expression. You are beyond all that the human mind can conceive, transcending existence and non-existence and whatever else there might be. Thus declare all the Vedas. Well may we rejoice and delight in praising You!

**38. O You of boundless form, You are the primeval Deity, the ancient Being; You are the supreme Refuge of this universe. You are the Knower, the One to be known and the supreme Goal. By You alone is this universe pervaded.**

**Y**ou are the supreme Refuge of the universe, for You alone remain at the time of *mahapralaya*, universal destruction. You are the Knower, the Spirit within us, and the God to whom all things turn and where they find their rest, being united with You.

Where there is oneness, unity, there alone is rest and satisfaction; and that can be found only in the Spirit, the one Reality on which this world of diversity appears like the light that plays on the surface of the water.

Moreover,

**39. You are Vayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, and the Moon. You are the Lord of creatures and the Great-grand sire. Salutations to You, my salutations a thousand times, again and again my salutations to You!**

**A**rjuna is in ecstasy. He has become a rishi, a seer of Truth. The scriptures are confirmed, they lie open before him in this vision. His samadhi carries him higher and higher. One truth after another unfolds. The Vedas are eternal. They can be read in all ages, they are stamped on the mind of every one of us. Through the grace of Sri Krishna Arjuna's spiritual eye is opened and page after

page of the Vedas is realized by him. He is exalted. What can he say? Words are weak instruments! How to sing the praises of his beloved Lord? It does not satisfy him. He is beyond all praise. In what direction shall I bow down to You, my Lord? I adore You in the east and in the west, in the north and in the south! You are omnipresent! Where are You not? What are You not?

**40. Salutations to You in front, salutations to You behind, salutations to You on all sides! O All, infinite in power and immeasurable in valour, You pervade all; therefore You are all.**

**E**verything contains You, everything is pervaded by You, nothing exists without You.

What more shall I say? Oh, how ignorant I have been:

**41. Not knowing this, Your glory, and regarding You merely as a friend, whatever I may have said presumptuously, out of either carelessness or fondness, addressing You as 'O Krishna, O Yadava, O Friend';**

**42. O Changeless One, in whatever manner I may have been disrespectful to You, in jest, in walking, in repose, in sitting, or at meals, alone or in the presence of others; O unfathomable One, I implore You to forgive all that.**

**F**orgive my presumption. I did not know any better. I meant no offence. Through our close friendship and association I had lost sight of Your godly nature. I began to look

upon You as my friend, beloved and respected, but Your divinity I had forgotten. Now I know better. You have in Your kindness opened my eyes. Indeed

**43. You are the Father of the moving and unmoving world, and its object of worship, greater than the great; O incomparable Power, no one in the three worlds exists equal to You. How then can anyone excel You?**

**Y**ou are the Ishvara, the Lord, the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe. Certainly none can be like You. There cannot possibly be two Ishvaras or two Lords. If there were more than one Ishvara, the world could not get on as it does. When one Ishvara desires to create, another may wish to destroy. There is no guarantee that all the Ishvaras would be of one mind. And as

they would all be independent of each other, the effort of one Ishvara in one direction would be neutralized by that of another in the opposite direction. There would be great confusion in the universe. 'Where there are two, there is fear', says the Upanishad. And so, when even Your equal does not exist, how can there exist a being superior to You? Therefore,

**44. O adorable Lord! Prostrating my body in adoration, I beg Your forgiveness. O God, as a father forgives his son, a friend his dear friend, a beloved one his love, even so do You forgive me!**

Forgive me my offences.

*(To be continued)*

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# Vedanta in Practice<sup>\*</sup>

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

(Translated by Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee)

At the outset it is necessary to be explicit on one point. Like others I too am a student of Vivekananda literature. Therefore I cannot claim that I have fully understood the import of Vivekananda's writings. As such it is inevitable that there would be vagueness and incompleteness in what I am going to say. Also, at present I am not in a position to devote as much time and put in as much hard work as would be required to do justice to all aspects of this vast subject.

## Acharya Shankara and Swami Vivekananda

It was the all-pervasiveness and perfection of Brahman that were taken up by Swami Vivekananda as the basis to formulate his guiding philosophy of life and programme of social uplift, or in other words, the framework of his 'Practical Vedanta'. The earlier masters had said and deliberated a good deal about this Brahman. It is necessary to comprehend in what respects Swamiji as an expounder of Brahman agreed with and differed from them. Of course, so far as truth goes, there cannot be any difference between Swamiji's Advaitic (non-dualist) position and that of the earlier masters. But whereas Shankaracharya is bent upon exposing and showing the truth in its unsullied form, Swamiji, seeing the same truth as pervading one and all, is determined to ap-

ply it in practice. Whereas Shankara, at every step, shows the mutual incompatibility of work and knowledge, Swamiji's efforts are directed towards harmonizing the two in the practical field. Whereas the former regards knowledge as Brahman Itself, established in Its own glory, in Swamiji's view the same is a blazing beacon guiding humanity on the road to progress. Therefore to understand Swamiji, it is necessary to understand Shankaracharya also to some extent. I take this as my starting point.

The path chalked out by Swamiji is not independent of the Upanishads and the Gita; they form the basis of Swamiji's philosophy. Therefore we have to examine their relation to Swamiji's thinking. Finally, we have to consider the plan of work formulated by Swamiji. We propose to proceed through these various stages.

Swami Vivekananda wanted to bring Vedanta out of forest confines and establish it in the habitats of people. The service of man in the spirit of worship that he preached is based on this Advaita Vedanta. The path of progress that he prescribed for humanity is also laid out on this ground of Advaita. In this context one question naturally arises. Shankaracharya summarized Advaita Vedanta in the words: '*Brahma satyam jaganmithyā*'; Brahman is real,

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\* Translation of a lecture in Bengali entitled 'Kārye Pariṇāta Vedānta', delivered at the Vivekananda Patha Chakra of the Department of Philosophy, Calcutta University, on 7 February 1958 by Swami Gambhirananda, President of Advaita Ashrama (1953-63) and later the 11th President (1985-88) of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The lecture was first published in two parts in the Chaitra 1364 BS and Vaishakh 1365 BS (March-April and April-May 1958) issues of the Bengali journal *Udbodhan*. It was later included in the second and subsequent editions of a collection of selected lectures of Swami Gambhirananda, published by Udbodhan Office under the title *Kaḥ Panthāḥ*.

the fleeting relative world is unreal.' How can the transcendental truth of this Advaita philosophy fit in with the down-to-earth ideas of worshipful service of people or of social uplift? Some modern thinkers even say that all the schools of religion in India are averse to the world. As long as their basic philosophical tenets do not change, how can they provide inspiration for worldly progress?

Although the two objections belong to different categories, there is a basic similarity between them. Both the questions generate in our mind doubts as to whether a world-negating Vedanta, or for that matter any religious school which is averse to the world, can provide inspiration for any positive endeavour. Apparently it cannot; yet Advaita Vedanta, wedded to an extreme form of negation of the world, forms the basis of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy and programme of action. More-

***Like Swami Vivekananda, his guru Sri Ramakrishna did not see any contradiction between Advaitic experience and practical activity.***

over, his guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa also gave him lessons in Advaita with utmost care. Further, after becoming established in nirvikalpa samadhi, the pinnacle of Advaita, Sri Ramakrishna himself proclaimed, 'Advaita is the last word in spirituality; with Advaitic realization in your possession, do as you wish.' This means, just like Swami Vivekananda, his guru Sri Ramakrishna did not see any contradiction between Advaitic experience and practical activity.

In terms of practical behaviour, such absence of contradiction can be observed in the lives of earlier masters too. Nobody doubts the fact that Shankaracharya was a knower of Brahman. It is also unanimously agreed that he is the principal exponent of Advaitism in the present age. Yet, even after attaining realization, he worked for the dissemination of

Advaitism by authoring books, founding monasteries, taking part in religious polemics, undertaking pilgrimages, composing devotional hymns, and so on. It is necessary to resolve this inconsistency. It is possible that out of such a resolution will emerge a ground for the synthesis of dualism and non-dualism.

**The Acts of the Perfected**

The Advaitic teachers found that, even after attainment of realization, a jnani (knower of Brahman) happens to give instructions to others. In fact, unless we agree to regard an instructor as a jnani, it detracts from the authenticity of the truth taught by him. Therefore, looking at the lives of the jnanis and listening to the sayings in the scriptures, one has to conclude that there is a state of existence called jivanmukti, in which one can remain established in perfect knowledge and yet from the

practical point of view engage oneself in activity. Still, from a rational viewpoint, coexistence of dualism and non-dualism is impossible. So, to explain this state, terms like parabdha (past actions that have already begun fructifying), *ajñānāleśa* (remnant of ignorance), *bādhita-anuvṛtti* (the reappearance of that which has been sublated) were brought in. Again, some say that in his own eyes the jnani does not do any work, but in the eyes of others he seems to be working. Whatever may be the explanation, from our lay viewpoint, jnanis do have their activities. But those activities are not exactly like ours. They are regulated by motives like providing guidance to people, by parabdha, or by God's command. Bhagavan Sri Krishna himself has described this state of being active or inactive in the Bhagavadgita:

*Naiva kiñcit karomīti*

*yukto manyeta tattvavit;*

*Paśyañ śṛṇvan sprśaṇ jighraṇn*

*aśnan gacchan svapañ śvasan.*

'The selfless karma yogi, having realized

the Truth, even while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping and breathing, is firmly convinced that the senses are occupied with their respective objects and knows for certain, "I do nothing at all."<sup>1</sup>

And he has provided the illustration:

*Na me pārthāsti kartavyarṇi  
triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana;  
Nānavāptam avāptavyarṇi  
varta eva ca karmaṇi.*

'I have, O Partha, no duty, nothing that I have not gained and nothing that I have to gain in the three worlds. Yet (for the good of people), I remain always engaged in action.' (3.22)

We get another example in the life of the sage-king Janaka: '*Karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhim āsthītā janakādayaḥ*; Verily by action alone Janaka and others attained *saṁsiddhi*.' (3.20)

While commenting on this, Shankaracharya said that the word *saṁsiddhi* can be taken to mean either 'purity of mind' or 'realization'. If we say that it means purity of mind, then there is nothing illogical in Janaka's being established in *saṁsiddhi* through action. And if realization be the meaning of *saṁsiddhi*, then we may construe that for some reason, even after the attainment of realization, Janaka's activities did not cease—he remained established in realization along with activity. According to the latter interpretation too, from the practical viewpoint, the jnani can still be involved in work. Shankara took the presence or absence of the idea of ownership and desire for results as the test of work and worklessness. Without the desire for results or the attitude of a doer, work is no work at all. So in this case the question of mixing work with knowledge cannot arise—'*naitat karma yena jñānena samuccīyeta*.' Furthermore, this state, one of activity to all appearances, represents in truth the acme of knowledge. The sage-king Janaka remained established in such knowledge. However that may be, herein we have an explanation as to how someone who has reached the Advaitic experience can still remain engaged in activ-

ity. We have also to keep in mind that when the ancient masters denied the coexistence of knowledge and work, they were examining the issue not at the worldly (or phenomenal) level but rather from the absolute standpoint. Although from the absolute viewpoint knowledge and renunciation of activity are inseparably connected, they did not emphasize external renunciation from the point of view of practice. Even Shankaracharya's line of reasoning here is mainly concerned with the state of the mind. From the point of view of psychology there is an insuperable barrier between the two modes of thinking—'I am doing work' and 'I am the actionless Atman'. Even Anandagiri in his gloss on Shankaracharya's exposition of the Shruti text *tapasā vāpyalīṅgāt* (the knowledge of Atman cannot be attained by austerity alone, without formal renunciation or *sannyasa*) has both Upanishadic thinking and practical considerations in mind when he observes: 'But is there not mention of realization of Atman by Indra, Janaka, Gargi, and others in the Vedic texts? Truly it is there. As they had no idea of possession, they too had that internal renunciation of everything which *sannyasa* stands for. Indeed, "the assumption of external signs of renunciation" is not the meaning intended herein.'<sup>2</sup>

It is a long-standing practice that a spiritual aspirant makes progress along the spiritual path by ascribing to himself the state of a perfected person. That is why Shankaracharya, in the course of his prefatory remarks on the the characteristics of a *sthitaprajna* (person of steady wisdom) in the second chapter of the Gita, writes, 'In all spiritual literature, cultivation of the attributes of a person who has reached perfection is prescribed as spiritual practice. This is because such cultivation requires a good deal of effort.' This leads us to the following conclusion: For various reasons, liberated persons, in spite of being beyond all bondage of duty, appear dutiful to people; a spiritual aspirant can progress by ascribing to

himself this state of a liberated being. For this reason, in the Gita Sri Krishna advises aspirants to simulate the conduct of earlier masters and perfected souls as regards 'doing no work in the midst of activity'.

### The Jnani's View of the World

In this context another question naturally arises in our mind. If, to a jnani, the world manifests as a reappearance of what has already been transcended, how then does he relate to it? He may regard the universe created by maya as illusory like a dream and attach no importance to it. That is, even though it appears reflected like a dream in his psyche, he may disdainfully withdraw his mind and pay little attention to it. Secondly, he may regard it as the manifestation of God's power, look at it cursorily, and yet keep himself aloof. We may recall that Shankaracharya concedes that maya is the inconceivable power of God. Thirdly, instead of evincing such apathy, he may see the world as the manifestation of the exquisite beauty of God endowed with maya, and establish a loving relation with it. All these attitudes may be found among Advaitists. Even monks recite reverently a good many devotional hymns, traditionally attributed to Shankaracharya. One of his hymns contains the following verse:

*Satyapi bhedāpagame nātha  
tavāham na māmakinastvam;  
Sāmuadro hi taraṅgo na kvacana  
samudrastāraṅgaḥ.*

'O Lord, even though there is no distinction between you and I, yet I belong to you; it does not behove me to say, "You belong to me." Although it is true that there exists not a bit of distinction between the sea and the wave, yet people say that the wave belongs to the sea; nobody says that the sea belongs to the wave.'<sup>3</sup>

Madhusudana Saraswati too consciously harmonized knowledge and devotion. The following well-known verse is attributed to him:

*Advaita sāmrajya pathādhirūdhās*

*trṇīkṛtākhaṇḍala vaibhavāśca;  
Śaṭhena kenāpi vayam haṭhena  
dāsīkṛtā gopavadhūviteṇa.*

'We have embarked on a journey to the Advaitic empire and have spurned Indra's riches as though they were mere grass. Yet we have somehow been forcibly enslaved by that deceitful seducer of the gopa women.'

Shridhara Swami too is a wayfarer on the same road. And the author of the Bhagavata writes:

*Ātmārāmāśca munayo  
nirgranthā apyurukrame;  
Kurvantyahaitukīm bhaktim  
itthambhūtaguṇo hariḥ.*

'Sages who remain absorbed in the Atman are devoid of all attachments, yet they remain devoted to the Lord without any motive; such is the glory of the Lord.'<sup>4</sup>

The conclusion we reach from the above discussion is that, even in the Advaitic tradition, there are certain stages in the life of an illumined person wherein there is simultaneous manifestation of knowledge, work and devotion, at least as seen by an empirical observer; an aspirant cultivates the same consciously in his life. It is natural to presume that this perspective affected to a great extent the thinking of Swami Vivekananda, an Advaitin that he was. Furthermore, in his opinion such an active Advaitism alone can be the starting point and unshakable basis of every religion, morality and social order. There is no other doctrine which has such a universal and liberal outlook and which calls people to march unwaveringly towards the Truth. Fixity of the goal combined with a ceaseless onward struggle to reach it, can be found in Advaita alone; and we will be discussing this point in due course. Let us first take up the application of Advaitism in the field of spirituality.

### Reconciling 'Neti, Neti' and 'Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma'

As we proceed to discuss Advaitic spiritual practice as delineated in the Upanishads,

two special phrases present themselves to us—one is ‘*neti neti*; not this, not this’ of the *Bṛihadaranyaka* and the other, ‘*sarvaṁ khalvidam brahma*; all this is verily Brahman’ of the *Chandogya*. These two sentences appear to be mutually contradictory, yet according to Shankaracharya they both have the same meaning. The first sentence introduces Brahman in a negative way; the second also introduces Brahman, and not ‘all’. Indeed this is so from the point of view of theory. But is it so as regards spiritual practice too? Theoretically, knowledge destroys ignorance, which is its antithesis. For destruction of ignorance nothing else can be accepted as an aid or auxiliary to knowledge of Brahman. Knowledge alone destroys ignorance, independent of all other things. When ignorance is dispelled Brahman manifests Itself spontaneously; any other positive effort for Its manifestation is pointless.

In semi-darkness one may mistake a piece of rope for a snake. To rectify that mistake one needs to bring light. But this action does not cause the appearance of any new property such as ‘manifestation’ in the rope. When everything else is negated through discrimination and deliberation—‘not this, not this’—Brahman manifests Itself of its own.

On the other hand, the *Chandogya* says, ‘This universe is verily Brahman Itself; for it is born out of That, dissolves into That, and exists in That. Therefore one should meditate by becoming calm. A person is identified with (his) conviction. As is a man’s conviction in this world, so does he become after departing from here. Therefore he should firmly take to that form of meditation which consists in remaining engrossed in the thought of That.’<sup>5</sup> As regards the mode of meditation, the *Upanishad* says, ‘This Atman of mine situated in the lotus of my heart is smaller than a rice or barley or mustard or *śyāmāka* seed or the kernel of a *śyāmāka* seed. This Atman of mine situated in the lotus of my heart is greater than the earth, greater than the intermediate space, greater than heaven—it is vaster than all these

worlds. That which is the performer of all actions, is possessed of all good desires, is possessed of all good smells, is possessed of all good essences, exists pervading all this ... that very entity is situated in the lotus of my heart as my Atman—it is Brahman.’ (3.14.2-4) Thus the identity of Atman and Brahman is established in stages in various ways. The first verse of the *Isha Upanishad* reflects this process and this feeling of identity:

*Īśāvāsyam idam sarvaṁ  
yat kiñca jagatyām jagat;  
Tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā  
mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam.*

‘All that is changeful in this universe should be covered by the Lord. Protect (your Self) through this detachment. Do not covet anybody’s wealth. Or, do not covet, (for) whose is (this) wealth?’

### Upanishadic Upasanas: The Stairways to Advaita

In the Upanishadic conception of meditation Swami Vivekananda found a graduated scheme for the establishment of the jiva’s identity with Brahman and hints about basing human life on Advaitism in accordance with that. He observed and mentioned how Satyakama Jabala of the *Chandogya Upanishad*, ordered by his guru Haridrumata Gautama, went to the deep forest to graze cows and realized that *sarvaṁ khalvidam brahma* there. The bull said to him, ‘The eastern side is one part, the western side is one part, the southern side is one part, and the northern side is one part of Brahman. This, my dear, is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four parts and called the Manifested.’ The fire said to him, ‘Earth is one part, intermediate space is one part, heaven is one part, and the ocean is one part. O dear one, this is surely one foot of Brahman, having four parts and called the Limitless.’ The swan said to him, ‘Fire is one part, the sun is one part, the moon is one part, and lightning is one part. O dear one, this is surely one foot of Brahman, having four parts and called the Effulgent.’

The diver-bird said to him, 'The vital force is one part, the eye is one part, the ear is one part, and the mind is one part. O dear one, this is surely one foot of Brahman, having four parts and named Āyatanavān (possessed of an abode).' (4.4-9) According to Shankaracharya, words like *bull* are to be understood in the sense of the presiding deities of the directions and so on. Although Swami Vivekananda did not reject that view, he said that Satyakama, with his natural spiritual inquisitiveness, became determined to realize Brahman even through such an ordinary work like grazing cattle. As a result, commonplace creatures and objects like bull, fire, and the rest had to become eloquent and lead him to the truth *sarvam khalvidam brahma*. The next story of the

disciple.

Brahman is all-pervasive; It is *bhūmā* (Infinite). In Vedanta this all-pervasiveness of Brahman has been accepted and described in many ways, using many terms. The different Upanishads prescribe methods for seeing Brahman everywhere and realizing one's Self everywhere through various meditations on Brahman. Further, it is accepted that progress on the path of realization occurs in stages—this being a ceaseless expedition from the smaller to the greater. Common objects of our everyday world are also not excluded from the sweep of this all-pervasive vision. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* prescribes meditation on food, vital force, mind, and other things as Brahman. Considering all this, Swami Viveka-

nanda reached the conclusion that at least in the age of the Upanishads meditation on Brahman was thus harmonized and identified with life and as a result the whole of life became transformed into one single meditation. A further hint or proof of this is available in the Purusha Yajna of the *Chandogya Upanishad*. (3.16) There it is stated

that a man indeed is a sacrifice. The first twenty-four years of his life represent the morning *savana* (libation). The Vasus are associated with the morning *savana* of this 'sacrifice that is man'. The vital forces are indeed the Vasus. The next forty-four years of life represent the midday *savana*. ... The last forty-eight years of life are the third *savana*, and so on. Then it is said that the hunger, thirst and lack of happiness of the performer of the Purusha Yajna constitute his initiation (into the sacrifice). (3.17) His eating, drinking, and feeling happy are similar to the partaking of food that follows initiation. His austerity, charity, sincerity, non-injury and truthfulness are the *dakṣiṇās* (offerings to the priest) of the Purusha Yajna. This is somewhat like the well-known Bengali song: 'My lying down I consider as

***The different Upanishads prescribe methods for seeing Brahman everywhere and realizing one's Self everywhere through various meditations on Brahman. ... Common objects of our everyday world are also not excluded from the sweep of this all-pervasive vision.***

*Chandogya* is also similar. The guru went out of station without instructing the disciple. Yet the fires, being tended by the disciple, became pleased and instructed him about Brahman, 'Prana (the vital force) is Brahman, *ka* (Bliss) is Brahman, *kha* (Space) is Brahman.' Then each fire instructed him separately. The fire known as Gārhapatyā said, 'Earth, fire, food, and sun are my body. The Person that is seen in the sun, that I am.' Then the fire named Anvāhāryāpacana (Dakṣiṇāgni) said, 'Water, directions, stars, and the moon (are my body). This Person that is seen in the moon, that I am.' The Āhavanīya fire said, 'Vital force, space, heaven, and lightning (are my body). This Person that is seen in lightning, that I am.' (4.10-14) Here also *sarvam khalvidam brahma* is spontaneously manifested in the heart of the

prostration and my sleep meditation upon Mother; and when I take my food, I think that I am offering an oblation to Mother Shyama.'

After this, when the *Taittiriya Upanishad* proclaimed the mantra '*Mātr̥devo bhava, pit̥r̥devo bhava, atithidevo bhava*; May you be one to whom mother is God, father is God, the guest is God', it was easy for Swami Vivekananda to tune in with *daridr̥devo bhava* ('may you be one to whom the poor is God') and so on. This is the culmination of the thinking of the Upanishads and is a most up-to-date prescription of spiritual practice well within the bounds of Advaita Vedanta.

But even this could not bring peace to the mind of Vivekananda. The line of thinking which extended so far in the Upanishadic age cannot possibly terminate at this point; its momentum cannot remain arrested here. If we penetrate into its heart, then we would have to proceed further, much further ahead. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* contains the verse

*Tvaṁ strī tvaṁ pumān asi  
tvaṁ kumāra uta vā kumārī;  
Tvaṁ jirṇo daṇḍena vañcasi  
tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ.*

'You are the woman, You are the man, You are the youth, and the maiden too; You are the aged man who totters along leaning on the staff; You, being born, assume various forms.'<sup>6</sup>

This idea must not remain confined to the scriptures; we need to experience it in everyday life and realize it in practice. We have to comprehend the integral view of Brahman beyond Its individuated manifestation, which is described in the *Purusha Sukta* and the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*. Thus the mantra says:

*Sahasraśīrṣā puruṣaḥ  
sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt;  
Sa bhūmim viśvato vṛtvā'  
tyatiṣṭhad daśāṅgulam.*

'That perfect Being has infinitely many heads, infinitely many eyes, infinitely many feet; although pervading the entire universe, It

situates Itself in the heart at a distance of ten finger-breadths above the navel.'<sup>7</sup>

*Sarvataḥ pāṇipādastat  
sarvato'kṣi śiromukham;  
Sarvataḥ śrutimalloke  
sarvaamāvṛtya tiṣṭhati.*

'The hands and feet of all creatures really belong to Brahman; so do the eyes, heads, and mouths of all living beings; so also the ears of all creatures. That pervades everything and exists in the bodies of all living beings as the *pratyagātman*.'<sup>8</sup>

This individual and collective manifestation of the Infinite is not to remain an object of meditation or an expression of truth alone; it must be made an object of worship in the practical world. It is desirable to do away with the hiatus created between life and the concept of Brahman. That is why Vivekananda wrote:

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,  
And to the very minutest atom,  
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;  
Friend, offer mind, soul, and body, at their feet.

These are His manifold forms before thee,  
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?  
Who loves all beings without distinction,  
He indeed is worshipping best his God.'<sup>9</sup>

(To be concluded)

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# Bioethics for Science and Technology: A Hindu Perspective

SWAMI JITATMANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

## Struggle for Existence Is Not the Way to Higher Evolution

The dualistic world of Newton slowly separated mind from matter and gradually brought the vision of a world where there is separation of man from man, man from God, and in the long run, nation from nation. Darwin's ideas of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest combined with the Newtonian vision of a dualistic universe; and civilization emerged 'red in tooth and claw'.

During his stay in Europe in 1895, Swami Vivekananda foresaw the dark future of the Western civilization based on the new theories of struggle for existence and scientific materialism. He prophesied a bloody future for the West, and the prophecy came true through the two World Wars, where the discoveries of science were used for mutual destruction. Ethics encourages mutual love and service. Humanity saw in the actions of applied science a flouting of ethics.

When the World Trade Centre fell to a devastating aircraft attack on 11 September 2001, with the instant death of several thousand innocent people, the world realized like the citizens of Denmark in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.' 'All they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword,' said Jesus Christ. Such acts of historic destruction invite, as Swami Vivekananda called it, 'the vengeance of history'.

During his extensive research on the evolution of flowers with ornate orchids, Darwin reached the concept of co-evolution, and veri-

fied that flowers and insects affect one another. Karl Zimmer in his latest book *Evolution* writes, 'Not long after Darwin finished his *Origin of Species* he discovered just how drastically flowers and insects could affect one another.'<sup>1</sup> This was the new concept known as co-evolution.

If plant evolution depends on such sophisticated cooperation between plant life and animal life, will not higher human evolution need more sophisticated, well-thought-out cooperation between humans and other life forms in the environment?

Contradicting Darwin's idea of struggle for existence for higher evolution, Swami Vivekananda explained the Hindu idea of higher evolution through conscious choice and thought power, in his interpretation of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*:

Competitions for life or sex-gratification are only momentary, unnecessary, extraneous efforts, caused by ignorance. Even when all competition has ceased, this perfect nature behind will make us go forward until everyone has become perfect. Therefore there is no reason to believe that competition is necessary to progress. In the animal the man was suppressed, but as soon as the door was opened, out rushed man. So in man there is the potential god, kept in by the locks and bars of ignorance. When knowledge breaks these bars, the God becomes manifest.<sup>2</sup>

Nobel physicist Erwin Schrödinger says that for ensuring the selection of a species for survival 'the behaviour' and the 'habits of life' are of 'outstanding importance and decisive influence'. Without these, Schrödinger argues,

the origin of species could not be understood. And what are behaviour and habits? They are products of our thoughts and volitions, both products of human consciousness. So a conscious struggle against the old state of existence plays the most important role in human evolution. Schrödinger writes:

If this is granted, it follows that consciousness and discord with one's own self are inseparably linked up, even that they must, as it were, be proportional to each other. This sounds a paradox, but the wisest of all times and peoples have testified to confirm it. Men and women for whom this world was lit in an unusually bright light of awareness, and who by life and word have, more than others, formed and transformed that work of art which we call humanity, testify by speech and writing or even by their very lives that more than others have they been torn by the pangs of inner discord. Let this be a consolation to him who also suffers from it. Without it nothing enduring has ever been begotten.<sup>3</sup>

Through strong organizing principles, life moves with the power of thought to progressively higher organizational levels. Abraham Maslow said that if one has to learn running, one better follow Olympic runners. If one has to find what is the highest human evolution, one should look to a Christ, Buddha or Ramakrishna.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* have prescribed two conditions for evolution. First, the change or evolution of one species into another occurs by the infilling of nature (*Jātyantara parināmaḥ prakṛtyāpūrāt*, 4.2), which means, evolution happens when the incompleteness felt by the organism is completed by new additions to it, which are the expressions of its own inherent potential. Small fish chased by bigger hungry ones may have developed wings, and by becoming birds evaded the jaws of death. Second, Patanjali says, a new environment brings out the organism's hidden desires which can

***What are behaviour and habits? They are products of our thoughts and volitions, both products of human consciousness. So a conscious struggle against the old state of existence plays the most important role in human evolution.***

be fulfilled in that environment (*Tatas tad vipāka anuguṇānām eva abhivṛyaktir vāsanānām*, 4.8). No knowledge of life or genes will be complete unless it takes note of both the external environment and the internal hidden possibilities of the living organism itself.

### Genetic Science Needs a New Orientation

What is a gene? In a 2003 publication, physicist Fritjof Capra writes:

All we can say about genes is that they are continuous or discontinuous DNA segments whose precise structures and specific functions are determined by the dynamics of the epigenetic network and may change with changing circumstances.

The gene industry began in the 1960s when property rights were given to plant breeders for new varieties of flowers through genetic engineering. In 1980, the US Supreme Court gave the landmark decision that genetically modified micro-organisms could be patented. This led a group of scientists from harmless patenting of life to 'monopolization of life' through advanced biotechnology researches resulting in market monopolies. New threats were perceived. In the book *Genetic Engineering—Dream or Nightmare?* geneticist Mao Wan Ho writes that the emergence of 'new viruses and antibiotic resistance in the past decade may well be connected with the large-scale commercialization of genetic engineering during the period'.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Capra writes that it has been experimentally confirmed that 'gene expression depends on the genetic and cellular environment and can change when genes are put

into a new environment. The situation is unlikely to change until geneticists begin to go beyond genes and focus on the complex organization of the cell as a whole'. Dr Candace Pert, a director of the National Institute of Mental Health, USA, after her successful experiments, prefers to say that the DNA belongs equally to mind and body. She uses the term body-mind.<sup>5</sup> 'Transferring the genes into a new environment and exciting them to do their jobs has, so far, proved too difficult a task for molecular geneticists,' writes David Weatherall, Director, Institute of Molecular Medicine, Oxford University. The final picture of gene functioning comes from 'the complex regulatory dynamics of the cell as a whole,' writes science historian Fox Keller. According to Keller, in the absence of the knowledge of the whole background of life, the dream of gene development or gene repairing for diseases 'recedes further into the future'.<sup>6</sup>

### Hindu Ethics for Medical Science

Medical intervention is sought for immediate alleviation of suffering as well as for long-term gains. Those procedures which yield more lasting results must be preferred. But facilities and possibilities for medical intervention to prolong and improve the quality of life are not equally available to all. According to a recent World Bank report, in spite of an optimistic estimate of economic growth, 600 million people in the developing countries were trapped in absolute poverty in the year 2000. This is defined as a condition of life so characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency. Under these appalling conditions, can a few privileged individuals (or nations) be allowed to enjoy excessive use of medical facilities for modifying their life process to make it more pleasurable, when a fraction of the amount of money so spent can prevent thousands of infants from death due to malnutrition and dehydration?<sup>7</sup>

Termination of pregnancy by medically induced abortion to prevent the birth of a viable child poses a number of socio-ethical problems. It is not generally encouraged in orthodox cultures and communities, and is considered sinful. It can be resorted to on strictly medical grounds, for example, if childbirth threatens the mother's life. Only recently has abortion been legalized in India (251), and that to stem the inordinate population explosion threatening global economy. Killing of the foetus in the mother's womb, *bhrūṇahatyā*, is a great sin according to Hinduism.

Indian culture teaches not only an ideal way of life but also the ideal manner of death. In fact, a devout person in India prepares throughout his life for an ideal, peaceful death as described in the scriptures. (253)

The modern scientific view has often emphasized the dignity of the individual and his right to take decisions for himself. Indian culture, however, lays greater stress on the role of society in decision making in health care. Interference in the process of birth in the form of prevention of conception, abortion or genetic engineering is not encouraged in the Indian tradition. Sex as a source of pleasure apart from conception, too, is not appreciated. Sex is legitimately allowed only for the birth of a child. Sex for pleasure alone is considered a far too inferior and unworthy attitude. In this connection it may be mentioned that the only foolproof method of prevention of AIDS (which has been officially advocated by experts in India) is abstinence from sex—something which the Hindu and Indian culture normally accepts. (260-1)

Hinduism even experimentally developed a science for the birth of good children. A mother desiring a God-fearing child listens to stories of saints and sages, and spends her days of pregnancy in devotional activities. Another mother seeking a warrior child engages in listening to and reading stories of wars and warriors, and so on.

According to the Jaina tradition, the foe-

tus of Lord Mahavira was taken out before his birth from the body of a miserly brahmin mother and transplanted into the womb of a generous queen.

A sage was chanting holy texts in the presence of his pregnant wife. On hearing the chant, the foetus in the womb of the lady spoke from inside that the intonations were not correct. This enraged the sage. He cursed his son in the womb that since he had a crooked mind, his body too would become crooked. The story goes that the child was born with eight deformities. He became the great and intellectually brilliant sage Ashtavakra.

Arjuna, the great hero of the Mahabharata war, had a prodigious son, Abhimanyu. While still in the womb, Abhimanyu had learnt a special military secret that his father described to his mother. But since the mother fell asleep and did not listen to the whole secret, Abhimanyu too obtained only a partial knowledge. With the help of this knowledge he was able to break and enter the special army formation of the enemy called *chakravyuha*. But due to incomplete knowledge, he could not come out of it and was killed.

Ashwatthama, another hero from the Mahabharata, out of intense hatred for the righteous Pandavas, fired the deadly and infallible weapon *brahmastra* to destroy the embryo of Parikshit, the lone successor to the Pandavas. The embryo was saved by Sri Krishna, God incarnate. Ashwatthama was cursed with extreme suffering for an infinite period of time with an open, painful wound on the forehead.

Mythologically, Brahma stands for the intellect. *Brahmastra*, therefore, means the weapon or instrument obtained as a gift of the intellect. The legend of Ashwatthama is thus symbolic of the use of intelligence for the destruction of the embryo or foetus, which is considered an unpardonable sin. The legends show

that although it is possible to modify the foetus in the womb, it is not free from danger. Respect for life in the mother's womb and offering better intellectual and spiritual environment to the expectant mother—these two are the basic ethics of Hinduism. (262, 271)

## Conclusion

Science has opened two avenues for us: power and knowledge. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Human beings are generally more drawn to the power aspect of science brought about by the technological revolution. In the glare of technology we have sometimes lost sight of the knowledge aspect of science, which alone encourages holistic ethics and elevates us from the snares and pulls of a purely individualistic, self-centred existence, and unites us with the whole of mankind.

Technologically advanced societies, both in the East and in the West, are in the grip of a deep socio-ethical turbulence. Americans,

***'The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy.'***

forty-eight per cent of whom use guns, have found themselves in a sort of 'gun civilization' (*Time*, 10 December 1992). Ethical problems are knocking even at the doors of the biggest political power. Seven thousand crime records and 15000 crime enquiries were made every day in 1997 in the city of St Petersburg alone (*Asiaweek*, 10 October 1997). Science and technology have enriched external life in a thousand ways, but in many places have created more and more of vacuum in internal life because of confused ethical values.

Prof Maurice H Wilkins, who shared the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1962 with Francis Crick and James Watson, revealed in an interview held in Bombay in January 1986 that

most scientists shy away from the political, psychological, spiritual, and other dimensions of their work. Normally, the whole question of these other dimensions is pushed out of the scene. Stephen Hawking, for instance, feels the need for a supervising God who must decide on what happens at the edge of universe. Yet Hawking's God is only a causal and logical principle. 'There would not be a connection with morality,' he pointed out.<sup>8</sup>

On the contrary, in 1979, Nobel physicist Steven Weinberg expressed an idea that is in consonance with the language of mystics, and tragedians like Sophocles or Shakespeare. He said, 'The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy.'<sup>9</sup> That is true knowledge which makes one free from the fetters of animal impulses and makes for divinity (*sā vidyā yā vimuktaye*), teaches Hinduism. This is echoed in Einstein's celebrated statement:

The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the power of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can compre-

hend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center [of] true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I belong to the ranks of devoutly religious men.<sup>10</sup>

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## Test of Dharma

विद्वद्भिः सेवितः सद्भिः नित्यमद्वेषरागिभिः ।  
हृदयेनाभ्यनुज्ञातो यो धर्मस्तन्निबोधत ॥

**K**now dharma to be that which is practised by the wise and the honest, who are free of hatred and attachment, and that which is approved by one's own conscience.

—*Manu Samhita*, 2.1

## Natural Selection of Morals

**T**he war of natural selection is carried on in human affairs not against weaker or incompatible individuals, but against their ideals or modes of life. It does not suffer any mode of life to prevail or persist but one which is compatible with social welfare.

—*Samuel Alexander*

# Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations

—Swami Satyanarayana

Concluding Programme at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math (4 to 6 January 2005)

Viewing the vast concourse of devotees from a vantage point during the concluding celebrations of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary, one got the impression that *concluding* was a misnomer and *continuing* was more appropriate. The celebrations had commenced last year at Holy Mother's *tithi puja* day at her home in Jayrambati. This 'concluding ceremony' seemed just a highpoint of the massive wave inundating the world; an inundation that saves, being spiritual in content and maternal in instinct.

The 9,000-odd devotees, rather Mother's children, who had assembled at Belur Math from across the country, and a few also from abroad, were united in their homage to Holy Mother in consonance with their deepest feelings of what is true and good. Everything bespoke Mother at Belur Math: her presence in the beautifully decorated temple temporarily made to look like her Jayrambati home, the huge gate leading to the tastefully decorated pandal and stage that hosted the celebrations, spruced-up grounds, decorated arches depicting her triumph over human hearts, elevating music and perfect weather. All this added to the holy precincts of Belur Math with the Ganga flowing close by was an experience that made a deep impression on everybody's minds.

The Ramakrishna Mission, sensing the need of the times, had decided on a year-long celebration. During the past year lakhs of people in urban, rural and even remote areas of the country had viewed, entertained and worshipped Holy Mother in her image, carried on *rathas* (chariots). Cultural programmes, elocution and essay competitions, debates, film shows, dramas, discourses, distribution of Holy Mother's pictures and literature, programmes initiated for the welfare of women and children, distribution of food and clothes to the needy, publication of literature commemorating Holy Mother, launching of websites, and so forth were conducted throughout the

The Inaugural Session





Holy Mother's Shrine

county. Thus Mission centres, with the help of innumerable *Bhava Prachar* centres and devoted individuals working in tandem, had succeeded in reaching Holy Mother to millions, cutting through economic, social, sectarian and astonishingly different religious barriers. The natural flame of devotion to God, smothered by the grind of daily living, was fanned by all these activities. The response everywhere was overwhelming and unprecedented. Holy Mother has herself said: 'He (Sri Ramakrishna) left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God.'

Many must have wished to be present at Belur Math but only a few of those who had participated and helped in the year-long celebration could make it. The delegates, though from different states, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds were bound by the common cord of Holy Mother's love. They were housed in the sprawling educational institutions of Ramakrishna

Mission Saradapitha adjacent to Belur Math. Sumptuous food and refreshments were arranged for them and for the sizable local delegates at the Math premises. The dignity and demeanour of the participants was throughout enhanced by a camaraderie that can be best described as filial. This was an added recompense to hundreds of monastics and non-monastics that worked tirelessly round the clock to synchronize all arrangements, big and small.

Ordinarily, visitors throng Belur Math daily. On *utsava* or celebration days the Math is packed. Holy Mother's *tithi puja* on 3 January 2005 saw devotees streaming in continuously. Suddenly the expansive grounds of Belur Math seemed woefully inadequate. Devotees waited patiently in serpentine queues for their turn to pay obeisance to Holy Mother and also at the other temples. The tremendous attraction for Holy Mother overawed even skeptical minds. There was no vestige of doubt that this setting would endure for the next three days and continue even after the celebrations. Sri Ramakrishna had said of Mother that 'she is a cat under ashes', meaning, her true nature was not easily recognizable. Going by what can be seen around, the ashes have been blown away, revealing Mother and vindicating Swamiji's words: 'You have not understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti there is no regeneration for the world.'

The inaugural session on 4 January saw devotees sitting expectantly by 9 am. Mother's huge picture was beaming down benignly on everybody from high above the stage. The proceedings commenced with the auspicious Vedic mantras chanted by *brahmacharins*. Swami Smaranananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, then welcomed the assembled devotees. All eyes were riveted on Most Revered Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, for his benediction. Most Revered Maharaj, was his usual spirited self despite ill health and advanced age, and exhorted all present to make Mother the centre of their lives for individual and social good. The benediction was then translated into Bengali and Hindi for the benefit of all. Srimat Swami Gahananandaji, Vice President of the Order, then read out his comprehensive inaugural address that showed how Holy Mother was becoming the focus of our lives. This session closed with a beautiful song on Mother by Swami Sarvagananda and delegates took time out for tea and snacks.

The second session chaired by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President of the Order, commenced at 10:20 am with a devotional song by Swami Ekavratana. Swami Prabhananda then delivered a learned discourse in English on 'The Mother of All', which was followed by Dr Kedarnath Labh's 'Mother as a great karma-yogini' in Hindi. A chorus song preceded Prof Shankari Prasad Basu's talk on 'Mother and Swamiji', which the speaker delivered with academic finesse. Then Swami Atmasthanandaji

spoke on Mother with his remarkable candour. The closing song by Swami Divyavratana was followed by the lunch and tea break, during which *Bhava Prachar* members along with some monastics got together for an informal business session.

The third session, with Swami Mumukshananda in the chair, commenced at 3:15 pm with Swami Animeshananda's song. Swami Atmapriyananda spoke on Mother's simple and practical solutions to deep spiritual truths. Swami Umananda, spoke in Bengali on Holy Mother and Sister Nivedita. Dr Raj Lakshmi Varma drew thought-provoking parallels between Sri Sarada Devi and Sita, in Hindi. Then there was a chorus song led by Swami Satyasthananda, after which came Swami Devarajananda's discourse in clear Bengali on Mother's natural divinity. The chairperson summed up the main thoughts in English and the session closed with a song by Swami Girijeshananda. After the vespers a sitar-tabla duet by Ustad Shahid Parvez and Pundit Shubankar Banerjee held the appreciating audience in thrall.

The fourth session began on the second day (5 January) at 8:30 am under the chairmanship of Swami Asaktananda. Students of Belur Math's Veda Vidyalaya chanted Sama Veda mantras. Swami Brahmeshananda spoke in English on Mother's Shakti aspect. Swami Satyarupananda speaking in mellifluous Hindi, indicated how Mother was an ideal for both monastics and the married. That Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna are identical was brought home in literary Bengali by Swami Sarvalokananda. *Brahmacharins* then sang a devotional song in chorus. Swami Jitatananda endeared himself to everyone by showing, with great flourish, Mother's relevance to modern society. A tea break preceded Swami Nikhileswarananda's Hindi lecture on how Mother embodied the four yogas. Swami Divyananda spoke in Bengali on Mother as *Sangha Janani*, Mother of the Ramakrishna Order, and Swami Nikhilatmananda sang a bhajan before everybody broke for lunch.

At 3:00 pm, after tea, the fifth session saw Srmat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President of the Order, in the chair. As usual the session began with a devotional song. Swami Harshananda, speaking in deliberate English showed Mother as a great practical Vedantist. Swami Vishwanathananda spoke of Mother as an ideal householder and ideal *sannyasini* in Bengali and Swami Atmaramananda presented her as a perfect symbol of unselfishness. A Sanskrit hymn was sung in chorus by monks of Advaita Ashrama after which Swami Nikhilatmananda spoke in wonderful Hindi about Mother as a unique world teacher. After Swami Gitanandaji's address the session closed with Swami Narendrananda's song. An entertaining and educative Hindi drama was staged by students of Ramakrishna Mission, Narainpur, Chattisgarh, showing select incidents in Swami Vivekananda's life. A Bastar Tribal dance performed by the same students won everybody's heart.

The various sessions in progress





The sixth session opened on the third and last day (6 January) at 8:30 am. This session was conducted by the *sannyasinis* of Sarada Math, Dakshineswar. Pravrajika Amalaprana, General Secretary, Sarada Math and Mission, presided. Students from the Nivedita Girls' School chanted Vedic hymns and sang devotional songs after which Dr Kamala Jaya Rao spoke with practiced ease on Holy Mother's universal message of love and harmony. Pravrajika Vedantaprana gave a charming discourse on Mother's three rare characteristics of forbearance, compassion and sacrifice, and Dr Bandita Bhattacharya dilated on Sister Nivedita's succinct observation about Mother: 'Her life was one life stillness of prayer.' Following a song by the *sannyasinis* of Sarada Math, Pravrajika Satchitprana spoke in Hindi of Mother as an ideal for all women everywhere. After the tea break, Dr Anjali Mukherjee painted a glowing profile of Mother's human aspect in Bengali. Smt Subrata Sen then described Mother's role in the awakening and liberation of women. The meeting adjourned for lunch after Pravrajika Amalaprana's presidential address and a closing song.

Swami Gokulananda chaired the seventh session that commenced at 3:00 pm with Vedic chanting by the *sannyasins* of Belur Math. Ms. Barbara Piner from the US, Dr Purba Sengupta of Kolkata and Sri Dharam Vir Seth of Delhi spoke in English, Bengali and Hindi respectively about what appealed to them in Holy Mother. Smt M S Shasikala from Hyderabad spoke in English on how Mother's message can be spread and the role devotees can play towards achieving this end. Sri G N Mallick of Raipur dwelt on the same topic in Hindi.

The valedictory session at 4:15 pm had Swami Smaranananda in the chair. Swami Purnatmananda spoke of Mother's combination of tradition and modernity in Bengali. Swami Shasankananda then showed, in Hindi, how Mother could be our ideal in our daily life. After the chairman's address, Swami Shivamayananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission presented the vote of thanks. The closing song by Swami Purushottamananda lifted the devotees' minds. The cultural programme after Sri Ramakrishna's arati was on 'Maha Ras'. The Nikunja Bihari Raslila Mandal enacted the Krishna-Radha scenes of Vrindavan with music and dance. Thus ended the celebrations.

The apprehension that too many lectures might tire the delegates was clearly unfounded. Delegates were all well grounded in the Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda literature and this is what helped, besides the high quality of the discourses. Each speaker was vastly experienced and each discourse appeared better than the preceding one. Devotional songs helped enliven the talks and speeches—as did the tea and snacks! Devotees have a caste of their own said Sri Ramakrishna and this was apparent in a magnified form during these three days. No one was a stranger. The devotees introduced themselves to each other and talked about their love for Holy Mother. Even the long wait in queues for lunch and dinner could not dampen the spirit of the devotees. The sessions in the morning were open only to delegates but the gates were open during the evening sessions and the cultural programmes for one and all. Chairs were provided for everyone and the eastern lawn of the temple was like a sea of heads. The entire event testified to Mother's all-embracing love and also her great power of attracting people of all kinds. Clearly, the future belongs to Mother. Who really is Mother entering into every heart? In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: 'She is Sarada, Saraswati; she has come to impart knowledge. She is the bestower of knowledge; she is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run? She is my Shakti.'

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# Sri Ramakrishna—The World Teacher

SUDESH

Our father and mother give us the physical body, but our guru gives us rebirth in the soul. The guru is the bright mask which God wears in order to come to us and as guru he teaches us the way to spiritual illumination. He is a tremendous spiritual dynamo that transmits its power to the immediate disciples and through them to future generations.

Spirituality does not exist in books or theories or philosophies. Book learning and scholarship are not preconditions for spiritual growth. Books can, at best, give us a hint regarding the path and the goal but cannot illumine our hearts. It is the magic touch of the guru and the living power of the holy name of God that transform life in a moment. His very presence inebriates the devotees with pure joy and all their doubts and conflicts are resolved even without formal questioning. The guru introduces us directly to the life of the Spirit and arranges for the union of the individual soul with the Beloved, the Divine Spirit. Such indeed is Sri Ramakrishna—the unique guru of humanity.

## The World Teacher

Sri Ramakrishna is a world teacher. His very life validates the authenticity of the world scriptures, his very life exemplifies Vedanta. Bhairavi Brahmani, Totapuri, Jatadhari, and all others who came to him as his teachers were strengthened and enriched; their inner perception was widened and hearts broadened by coming into contact with this strange, unconventional pupil, the guru of all gurus. Blessed were the disciples who sat at his feet to learn from him the principles of spirituality; their ego was destroyed in just 'three croaks', as it were, their pride humbled and their inner vision opened in the presence of this embodi-

ment of humility.

Such was Sri Ramakrishna's humility that he used to say three words pricked him like thorns—when he was called guru, father or master. If someone addressed him as guru or father, he would say that there was no teacher except *satchidananda*; It alone took one across the ocean of the world. And he was the eternal child of God, how could he be a father? Yet he was an extra-ordinary guru—the guru of the universe. Rakhal, later Swami Brahmananda, said: '... he graciously revealed to me that (he) my guru is also the Guru of the universe'.<sup>1</sup>

Sublime and gentle was the influence Sri Ramakrishna exerted on others. Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, a well-known Brahmo preacher in Europe and America, could not escape the spell of the Master's personality. He wrote:

What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centred, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I, who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? ... And it is not I only, but dozens like me, who do the same. ... He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantic doctrines. ... He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator on the perfections of the One Formless, Absolute, Infinite Deity. ... His religion is ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with a permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. ... So long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality, and inebriation in the love of God. He, by his childlike bhakti, by

his strong conceptions of an ever-ready Motherhood, helped to unfold it (God as our Mother) in our minds wonderfully. ... By associating with him we learnt to realize better the divine attributes as scattered over the three hundred and thirty millions of deities of mythological India, the gods of the Puranas.<sup>2</sup>

### Redeemer of the Lowly

Was Sri Ramakrishna the guru of the virtuous only? His glory lay in uplifting his wayward children. The drunkards and the debauchees, prostitutes and theatre-women, bohemians and rebels, agnostics and sceptics, all found refuge at his feet and received his grace. After all, what glory lay in making a virtuous man good? The glory of a great spiritual teacher lies in redeeming the fallen by uprooting their inherent tendencies and bringing about a miraculous transformation—in making saints of repenting sinners. This physician of human maladies applied the curing herb gently. He did not try to root out one's deep-rooted samskaras forcibly, for this could cause a lot of suffering and effect only a temporary cure, the malady recurring with greater intensity. An expert physician allows the boil to come to a head and then cuts it open with a knife; similar was Sri Ramakrishna's way of dealing with human follies and weaknesses, which ensured complete and permanent transformation. He too brought one's samskaras to the surface and then overpowered them with his all-encompassing divine love. Getting a little taste of joy in higher things, one becomes freed from one's base passions and undesirable habits, unwittingly, without feeling the pain of suppressing or subduing them forcibly.

Girish Chandra and Kalipada Ghosh are two examples of this transforming power of Sri Ramakrishna. Girish Chandra Ghosh reminisces:

From my early childhood it had been my nature to do the very thing that I was forbidden to do. But Sri Ramakrishna was a unique teacher. Never for one moment did he restrict me, and that in itself worked a miracle in my life. ...

Sri Ramakrishna has taken full possession of my heart and bound it with his love. But such a love cannot be measured by any earthly standard. If I have acquired any virtues, it is not through my own efforts, but solely due to his grace. He literally accepted my sins and left my soul free. ...

The significance of the word *guru* has dawned on me gradually. It was a slow process, but its effect was deeply penetrating. Now I have realized that the guru is everything. ... To this redeemer of my soul I have paid little homage. In a drunken state I have abused him. When given the opportunity to serve him, I have ignored it. But I have no regrets. In my attempts to escape all discipline I found myself disciplined without knowing it. Such is my guru's grace—an infinite ocean of mercy, not conferred because of merit, nor withheld because of sin, but lavished on saint and sinner alike. With a love transcending reason, he has given me sanctuary, and I have no fear.<sup>3</sup>

It was Sri Ramakrishna's gigantic heart which made him see the Blissful Mother even in the street women. Seeing one, he bowed to her, exclaiming, 'Mother, in one form You are this and in another form You are in the temple.' Due to his tremendous love for all, he blessed Binodini, who had played the role of Sri Chaitanya in the *Chaitanya Lila*, saying, 'Mother, be illumined!' Sri Ramakrishna's loving, hopeful message sustained her all her life and she wrote: 'I don't care if people of the world look down upon my sinful life. I was blessed by Sri Ramakrishna. His loving, hopeful message still sustains me.'<sup>4</sup> It was Sri Ramakrishna's all-embracing love and firm conviction in the potential divinity in all that acted as a purifying influence and helped even the drunkards and the women of ill-fame to manifest this divinity in life. Saviour of the fallen he truly was!

Paramahansa Ramakrishna, whose mere touch, or benign glance, or word was enough to awaken one's spiritual consciousness, was at the same time totally untouched by the idea of being a teacher. He remained for ever the child and a willing instrument in the

hands of the Divine Mother. His method of instruction was as stately as his teachings were sublime. He never said 'do this' or 'do that' nor prescribed hard and fast rules about fasting and practising austerities.

This blissful child of the Divine Mother had a sweet, innocent way of saying, 'I said this to Keshab', 'The Gita also says so', 'It was such and such a holy man who told me of Narada's path of devotion as especially suited to the people of Kaliyuga', 'I have heard it from Nangta, once for all, that this universe is only a fragment of Brahman', and so forth. This great teacher did not confuse the mind with intricate philosophy or abstruse doctrines. He taught through simple utterances and interesting tales and parables the profound mysteries of spirituality. Again, he taught by living the life. But what depth of meaning, profundity of thought and purity of intention do we find in the ordinary daily conduct and utterances of the Master! The only thought in his mind was to save and elevate to a higher plane the erring mortals drowned in the mire of worldliness. Blinded by maya (lust and lucre) human beings are in a state of chronic intoxication. He appealed in all earnestness, 'I fall at your feet and beg of you to chant the name of Hari.' Without ever getting annoyed, he, the ocean of infinite mercy, repeated the same sage instructions over and over again. So humble and so compassionate was he that instead of taking service from his disciples, he himself served them so that they could practise spiritual disciplines. Once he observed, 'Rakhal is getting into such a spiritual mood that he cannot do anything even for himself. I have to get water for him.'<sup>5</sup>

### His Method: Catering to Individual Needs

The most striking feature of Sri Ramakrishna's method is that to each individual or particular sect he prescribed the remedy that suited the malady and the individual requirement. To the Brahmos he said, 'Why should I produce only a monotone when I have an in-

strument with seven holes? Why should I say nothing but "I am He" or "Brahma, Brahma". I want to make merry with God through all the moods.' And to the Vaishnavites he said, 'Why should I be one-sided? The worshippers of Vishnu and the worshippers of Shakti will all ultimately reach the same goal.' To the Vedantist he would say, 'Let us now give up "I am He" and keep "Thou and I" to enjoy the fun.' To the Shaktas he said, 'Shiva, Kali, Hari are but different forms of that One. Brahman and Shakti are identical.' To those who believed in God with form and others who believed in the Formless Reality and fought over it, he explained that the same *satchidananda* assumed forms under the cooling influence of bhakti and again became formless with the rise of the sun of Knowledge.

On many occasions we see that Sri Ramakrishna gave completely contradictory advice under similar situations and circumstances: In early life, Nityaniranjana Ghosh, a disciple of his, had a violent temper. One day, as he was coming in a country boat to Dakshineswar, some of his fellow passengers began to speak ill of the Master. Finding his protest futile, Niranjana began to rock the boat, threatening to sink it midstream. That silenced the offenders. When he reported this incident to the Master, he was rebuked for his inability to control his anger. Jogindranath, another disciple, was on the other hand gentle to a fault. One day, under similar circumstances, he curbed his temper and held his peace. The Master on learning of his conduct scolded him roundly. The guru was striving to develop in the first instance composure, and in the second mettle.

Harinath had led the austere life of a brahmacharin even from his early boyhood and had an aversion for women. When he said to the Master that he could not allow even small girls to come near him, the Master said: 'Why should you hate women? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Regard them as your own mother and you will never feel their evil influence. The more you hate

them, the more you will fall into their snare.' To Hariprasanna, another disciple of his, the Master advised: 'Even if a woman is pure as gold and rolls on the ground for love of God, do not look at her.'

On hearing that Ishan was building a house on the bank of the Ganga to practise spiritual discipline, the Master observed, 'Let me tell you that the less people know of your spiritual life, the better it will be for you. Devotees endowed with sattva meditate in a secluded corner or in a forest or withdraw into the mind. Sometimes they meditate inside the mosquito net.' On the other hand, he advised Shyam Babu, an elderly man who wanted to devote his time to contemplation, to build a quiet place for meditation upon God, saying that the worldly life was all hollow and that it would not be possible to think of God amidst worldly confusion.

### The Ideal of Monks

Truly Sri Ramakrishna is the ideal of monks. The rules enjoined upon a monk by Sri Ramakrishna are strict indeed, the path being one of total renunciation. There is absolutely no scope for any compromise since the ideal is very pure and high. The monks belong to the realm of unsullied spiritual aristocracy and so they should be very careful to stick to principles and highly sensitive to degrading influences.

The sannyasins being world teachers, for them self-control is imperative, absolute, and final. They are men of unbroken celibacy. Their lives should be unstained by 'woman and gold'. A sannyasin must not sit near a woman, nor talk to her for a long time, even if she be pious and a sincere devotee of God. He must not even look at the portrait of a woman which may evoke lust. Even though he has subdued his passions, a sannyasin should not associate with women, to set an example to others. The sannyasin's way of living is like fasting on the *ekadashi* day, without taking even a drop of water. He should regard all

women as his own mother in which attitude there is not the slightest trace of sensual enjoyment. Like women, money too is dangerous like poison to a sannyasin. It causes worry, pride, anger, and calculation, and inflames one's desire for physical comfort—*rajas*, which brings *tamas* in its train and makes one forget God. He must not set store for the morrow depending one hundred per cent on God. He who eats no 'molasses' must not even keep molasses about. If he does, and yet tells others not to eat molasses, they won't listen to him. People will say that he enjoys molasses secretly. Even so, a true sannyasin must renounce 'woman and gold' both mentally and outwardly. He fights the battle staying in the open and not from within a fort.

A sannyasin, being in very little need of worldly objects, is like the bee which alights only on flowers in order to sip honey, whereas a householder is like the ordinary fly which now sips honey but the next moment sits on filth and festering sores. A sannyasin should always meditate on the lotus feet of God and dive deep into God-consciousness. He must merge his life, mind and innermost soul in God. Thus enjoying the sweetness of God's bliss, a monk must remain always blissful and cheerful. Hearing the name and glories of God from such a one, seeing his ecstatic love for God, love is awakened in the hearts of the worldly-minded too.

A sannyasin is imbued with a strong spirit of discrimination, dispassion, truthfulness, non-accumulation, chastity, and renunciation. In such a pure heart God takes his seat and manifests His special power. By his personal example, the sannyasin strives to instil the spirit of renunciation, love of God, and spiritual fervour even in a worldly man, unmindful of his own comforts.

His knowledge is like that of the shining sun which gives warmth and light to all. The sannyasin's mind soars high in the spiritual firmament but comes down to enlighten worldly men groping in darkness and ignorance. He

is compassionate, loving, free from ego, humble, and tolerant towards the followers of all spiritual paths. When a sannyasin gives something to another, he knows that it is not he who gives and that compassion belongs to God alone. Likewise, in receiving gifts from anyone, the sannyasin knows that God alone is the supplier of his needs. As a sannyasin does not entangle himself in worldly life, he is more perceptive and gives dispassioned advice to the afflicted and the miserable.

### Advice to Householders

No less profound and significant are Paramahansa Deva's teachings to the householder devotees of God. While leading a worldly life and aspiring to realize God, one must be up and doing and not like 'elder, the pumpkin cutter' of the parable. One must perform one's duties as well as keep one's mind fixed on the Lord by reading books of devotion, by singing his name and glories, and through japa and meditation. One should seek holy company, and now and then retire into solitude to call on God intensely, distancing oneself from all worldly thought. A worldly man should pray to God sincerely for knowledge and devotion alone, and not for creature comforts, health or possessions. He should take shelter in God and weep for His vision. Tears shed for God-vision wash away the dirt and dust of worldliness—animal passions and greed. Amidst one's secular work one must set aside some time for practising one's spiritual disciplines. Even while engaged in activities one should hold on to God; otherwise while whirling rapidly around one will feel giddy and suffer from troubles and turmoil. Everyday one should immerse oneself in the bliss of God-consciousness and even while performing daily duties allow that roseate intoxication to remain.

'It is necessary to do a certain amount of work. But one must finish it off speedily,' says Sri Ramakrishna. Must we remain engrossed in meaningless activity all our lives and at all

hours of the day? One should finish the few duties at hand and not take up fresh ones. One should pray to God to lessen one's duties, as these tend to make one forget God, and must perform such works in an unselfish way. As love of God grows in the heart, all worldly duties recede more and more into the background and God begins to capture our mind more deeply. As one's yearning for God becomes intense, one will no longer bother to think what will happen to one's family if one does not look after it. A man intoxicated with divine bliss can only say, 'O Mother, O Mother, ... not I but You; do with me as it pleases You; teach me to merge my will into Yours; with unflagging love I seek You and You alone, O Mother!' If a man is so inebriated with the love of God, then he has no more duties to perform. God Himself will take care of his morrow. Drinking deep the elixir of divine Love, he will glide like a swan straight towards the goal. And then will vanish for him this samsara of maya 'where "self", "self"—this always the only note', 'where war and competition ceaseless run', 'where darkness is interpreted as light'! All his innate clinging to duty and all false identification and association will vanish. Then only shall he wake up from this brutalizing dream about the reality of the world and realize that he is 'heir to immortal bliss'.

### Conclusion

Thus we see what a unique and all-encompassing message we have in Sri Ramakrishna. Truly he is a saviour with the power to transform lives. Swamiji says in a lecture on 'Discipleship', delivered at San Francisco, that our preparation must go on till the guru comes; that he is nothing less than God and must be worshipped as God; that as one steadily looks on, the guru gradually melts away. The guru picture gives place to God Himself.<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who have taken shelter at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna for he himself is the guru who comes through the conduit of a human form out of his infinite love for devotees;

he is the way as well as the goal. Pandit Gauri, a proficient and advanced soul, declared that Sri Ramakrishna was that 'Mine of Spiritual Power' only a fraction of which descended on earth from time to time in the form of an Incarnation. As one meditates on him, he reveals more and more of his attributes and glories, and to some fortunate souls he even grants his vision.

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For the first time I had found a man [Sri Ramakrishna] who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to go to that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can change a whole life.

—Swami Vivekananda, *My Master*

A monk called Hung Chou came to visit Ma Tsu and asked: 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?' Ma Tsu said: 'Bow down to me, first.' As the monk was prostrating himself, Ma Tsu gave him a vigorous kick in the chest. The monk was at once enlightened. He stood up, clapped his hands and, laughing loudly, cried: 'Oh, how wonderful this is, how marvellous this is! Hundreds and thousands of *Samadhis* and infinite wonders of the Truth are now easily realized on the tip of a single hair!' He then made obeisance to Ma Tsu. Afterwards he said to people: 'Since I received that kick from Ma Tsu, I have been cheerful and laughing.'

—Chang Chen-Chi, *The Practice of Zen*

The Master was looking at me [Swami Vijnanananda] intently. I thought it was time for me to depart, so I prostrated before him. As I stood up to go, he asked: "Can you wrestle? Come, let me see how well you wrestle!" With these words he stood up, ready to grapple with me. I was surprised at this challenge. I thought to myself, "What kind of holy man is this?" But I replied, "Yes, of course I can wrestle."

'Sri Ramakrishna came closer, smiling. He caught hold of my arms and began to shove me, but I was a strong, muscular young man and I pushed him back to the wall. He was still smiling and holding me with a strong grip. Gradually I felt a sort of electric current coming out of his hands and entering into me. The touch made me completely helpless. I lost all my physical strength. I went into ecstasy, and the hair of my body stood on end. Releasing me, the Master said with a smile, "Well, you are the winner."'

—Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them*

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# Paving the Path for Dhyana

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

## The Classical Posture and Its Obstacles

**B**ody, head and neck erect and still, being steady, gazing at the tip of one's own nose, and not looking around.<sup>1</sup>

This instruction regarding posture for yoga is not to be interpreted to mean that the aspirant will sit stock-still and squint-eyed studying the nose. Sri Shankaracharya in his commentary on this stanza of the Bhagavadgita makes it clear: 'The words *as it were* are to be understood ... it is fixing the gaze of the eyes by withdrawing them from external objects ... with a view to concentrating the mind ... on the Atman.' The process commences with gazing fixedly; then 'the sense organs are withdrawn into the heart with the help of the mind.'<sup>2</sup> This is the classical posture and attitude for dhyana, meditation. This brief article uses the word *dhyana* in the sense of profound one-pointed concentration. Some interpretations, bordering on the absurd, as to why one's gaze ought to be fixed on the nose, float about. But Madhusudana Saraswati in his *Gudhartha-dipika* has, following tradition, pointed out two reasons: one, to eliminate *laya*, torpor, and two, to arrest *vikshepa*, distraction.<sup>3</sup>

Whether one sits with eyes closed or half-closed the reduction of sensory stimuli reaching the psychophysical organism is inevitable. This, plus the conscious will to withdraw from all stimuli, makes a mind that is steeped in extroversion feel a vacuum. Then as a consequence comes sleep, 'a modification (of the mind) that embraces the feeling of voidness.'<sup>4</sup> If an aspirant's mind is not subject wholly to the first obstacle of *laya*, then an equally strong second obstacle of *vikshepa* takes over. Here one experiences more vividly, uncontrolled subconscious thoughts and feelings as well as conscious thoughts, overwhelming and destroy-

ing the force that is trying to subdue them as though some papier-mâché were being ripped. These two powerful obstacles frustrate and pull down most aspirants. They are, however, more pronounced for those who sit with eyes shut.

## Binocular Vision and Its Connection with Thoughts

If humans were born like the Cyclops, a race of giants met with in Greek mythology with only one eye in the centre of the forehead, we could have gazed at the tip of our nose without difficulty because of monocular vision. If meditation strictly meant 'gazing at the tip of one's own nose' these Cyclops could have become great yogis. But the disadvantage in monocular vision is the inadequacy of depth perception. Therefore accurate location of objects in space becomes difficult for one-eyed creatures, and this may affect survival. Beings equipped with binocular vision are better equipped to perceive the world and form a relatively correct impression of the location and features of objects in their environment. These eyes, so acute and reliable, have their own limitations and strangeness. One of these becomes apparent while gazing at objects close to the nose. To see for ourselves: hold the two forefingers, pointed at each other, half an inch apart, about two to three inches from the tip of the nose, and gaze at them with both eyes open. One sees the curious sight of a small finger with rounded ends floating between the forefingers. Truly speaking, perception occurs in the brain. The authors and commentators on Yoga evidently knew that focusing on the tip of the nose is difficult due to binocular disparity but this rule will be appreciated better when it is remembered that thoughts are perceived in the space

in and around the eyes and not at the back of the head or its sides. It is also an acknowledged fact that by the control of the eyeballs, a partial control of thought is effected. Hence Swamiji, a great yogi himself, exhorts, 'Sit straight, and look at the tip of your nose. Later on we shall come to know how that concentrates the mind, how by controlling the two optic nerves one advances a long way towards the control of the arc of reaction, and so to the control of the will.'<sup>5</sup>

### Intensity of Thought Shuts Out the External World

Many aspirants excuse themselves from this time-tested instruction by saying that keeping the eyes half-closed and gazing fixedly does not help withdraw the mind from external objects. They find keeping the eyes shut more comfortable. This is often simply an excuse to sit passively in the name of dhyana and be overcome by lethargy in degrees. These same aspirants, when absent-minded or preoccupied with some absorbing thoughts, can simply shut out the external world, even in the midst of tremendous sensory stimulation as occurs in a busy street or a bazaar. They would then say, 'My mind was elsewhere, I did not see it; my mind was elsewhere, I did not hear it.'<sup>6</sup> In Sri Ramakrishna's simple words, during dhyana 'the senses stop functioning; the mind does not look outside. It is like closing the gate of the outer court of the house. The five objects of the senses: form, taste, touch, smell, and hearing ... are all left outside.'<sup>7</sup>

### The Necessity of Immobility

Before 'gazing at the tip of one's own nose' it was advised to sit erect and still. Swamiji clarifies why: 'The spinal cord although not attached to the vertebral column, is yet inside of it. If you sit crookedly you disturb this spinal cord, so let it be free. Any time you sit crookedly and try to meditate you do yourself an injury.'<sup>8</sup> Ordinarily, being alert straightens

the spine, lightens the breath and makes the eyes focused. Yoga demands this alertness in full measure. Regarding this the *Brahma Sutras* say: '*Acalatvam cāpekṣya*; (Meditation is) attributed from the standpoint of motionlessness.'<sup>9</sup> There has to be absolute stillness so as to leave undisturbed the kinesthetic sense. This kinesthetic sense is attributed to four types of nerves that are widely distributed in the joints, muscles, and tendons all over the body. These nerves, with different types of endings, sense the contraction and stretching of the muscles and joints; they also regulate the reflex and voluntary movements. All sensations of movement, even the microscopic, are transmitted via these sensors to the spinal cord and brain. Here they interact with both the autonomic and voluntary centres responsible for controlling bodily movements. Hence movement will keep the nerves, spinal cord, and parts of the brain busy enough to distract meditation. In fact, the main function of the kinesthetic or proprioceptive sense is to make the subject conscious of the sense of self (body).

### Nystagmus: Movement and Tremors of the Eye

There are two obstacles to stilling the eyes. First is the vestibular sense that takes care of the body's orientation and balance, and for which the inner ear is responsible. These fluid-filled canals of the inner ear are lined with cells with very fine hairs projecting into the fluid. Any movement of the body disturbs this fluid, these disturbances generate electrical impulses in the nerves attached to the 'hair cells', and these impulses are transmitted to the motor nerves that then make the eyeballs move. This movement is called vestibular nystagmus. Of course, it goes without saying that the slightest movement of the eyes will disturb concentration. The second type of nystagmus is the high-frequency tremor of the eyes. The eye performs not like a fixed camera but a moving one, albeit with a difference: it constantly keeps moving back and forth while fo-

cusing on a moving scene. If one stares at a small object, say a point of light, isolated and fixed, it will seem to move; actually it is the eye that is having high-frequency tremors. On the other hand, if somehow the nystagmic tremors can be arrested and the object too is still as before, then the perceiver will, for a fraction of a second, have an enhanced image which will immediately blur and then disappear, reappear broken up, again disappear, and so on. These high-frequency tremors of the eyes, technically called autokinetic nystagmus, are an inextricable part of focussed visual perception. When nystagmus is operative it implies that the perceiver is aware of external objects and is not yet in the meditation mode.

### The Leader

The word *netra*, meaning 'leader' or 'conductor', is the Sanskrit for eye. Among the five senses—visual, gustatory, olfactory, tactile, and auditory—the conspicuous leader is the visual organ. From the earliest times humans were aware of their hand-eye coordination and used it well to survive in a competitive and dangerous environment. Finely tuned hand-eye coordination is generally seen in sportspersons; hence their actions are so fluid and controlled. Contrariwise, a person with poor hand-eye coordination is called clumsy. Before a tennis player can lunge to return the ball, its flight will have to be closely followed; if the eyes are not focused then actions become erratic. It is a fact that restless or nervous persons are quickly noticed by the way their eyes and body, down to the fingers, behave. A calm person will have a steady look in his eyes. 'The hands, feet and eyes of an ascetic are not restless, also his words are not unrestrained; these are the signs by which the wise [one] is known.'<sup>10</sup> Thus it becomes clear that the eyes have a sort of controlling power on the body.

### Japa as Preparatory to Meditation

Japa is recommended for those having an inclination for a meditative life but whose na-

ture alternates between restlessness and calmness. Japa is recommended preparatory to meditation because the tendency to restlessness is removed by having that restless energy vibrate harmoniously and rhythmically, making it pliant for control. This is done by repeating the mantra at a set speed, with devotion, while keeping count with the help of a rosary or one's fingers. Parallel to japa the aspirant is advised to withdraw the mind inside by visualizing the deity in the heart. 'From that is gained (the power of) introspection, and the destruction of obstacles.'<sup>11</sup> Japa done with regularity will change the way one walks, talks, looks, and behaves; this is due to the serenity that comes over the entire psychophysical system. When this is accomplished, the mind itself will want to go deeper into itself for it has found a new dimension far removed from what the senses constantly deliver. Thus is set the stage for dhyana.

### Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga is sudden, forcible yoga. This yoga does not like to waste time doing things slowly. It has a tailor-made discipline to eliminate *laya* and *vikshepa* known as *trāṭaka*. To modify it for our purpose, a pleasant object (a picture of God or a symbol like Om or, more commonly, a burning candle) is placed at eye level and at a comfortable distance of about a metre. The body is kept steady and the object is gazed upon with full attention, scrutinizing every detail. The eyes should not waver nor should there be conscious blinking. After a few minutes (the duration depends on individual capacity), as a dull ache commences in the eyeballs or the tear ducts become activated, the eyes must be shut. The image of this object now has to be gazed upon in the mind, the process kept up till the mental image begins to fade. Then the eyes have to be opened again and the gaze re-fixed on the object. Alternating like this helps the mind develop the power of concentration, both internal and external. As *trāṭaka* matures, the external object is done

away with, for its support is no longer required. This practice has to be taken up cautiously and persons with eye or related problems are debarred for obvious reasons, although hatha yoga claims that *trātaka* cures eye diseases. The books also mention that *trātaka* is like a treasure chest and ought to be maintained with care.<sup>12</sup> It may be interesting to compare the following meditation as described by Sri Ramakrishna: 'I used to meditate on a flame of light. I thought of the red part as gross, the yellow part inside the red as subtle, and the stick-like black part, which is the innermost of all, as the causal.'<sup>13</sup>

Though not central to this article, it should also be mentioned that hatha yoga makes use of various asanas, kriyas, and mudras (postures, purifications, and symbolic gestures) to distill the body of its impurities. It is believed, and rightly so, that only a body that is clean from the inside can sit still for a long time undisturbed. Perhaps the most popular discipline prescribed in hatha yoga is pranayama. Pranayama, the control of prana, executed correctly under a guru, gives a wonderful control over the body and mind, and eventually leads to yoga.

### The Psychological Present

Metaphorically speaking, a moment of time steps out from behind the dark curtain of the future, appears briefly on stage, and then quickly vanishes into the gloom of the green-room called the past. Time seems dependent on two events one preceding and the other succeeding; but both have to be perceived for the idea of succession to arise along with that of time. When we are absorbed in a task, time flies; sit idly and time seems to crawl. Besides being entirely dependent on our state of mind, time is also one of its very foundations. During one-pointed concentration, stimulus deprivation and a high level of motivation make a moment seem to hang on and on. This is the psychological present; this is disturbed by even the slightest of kinesthetic or vestibular activity.

### The Leader behind the Leader

The nervous system is designed in such a way that every sensory impulse (action) is translated into a motor impulse (reaction). The senses undoubtedly lead the body (imagine someone without sense organs; that person will be a vegetable). It was shown that the eyes lead the rest of the senses. The scriptures and also common sense are unanimous that the mind is obviously higher than the senses and is their real leader. It was also demonstrated that perceptions, thoughts, and feelings are largely responsible for making the eyeballs move. That there is a connection between the eyes and thoughts needs no proof, for we are the proof. In fact, the eyes are said to be an extension of the brain. Our thoughts get reflected in our eyes, that is why eyes are called 'windows of the soul'. Tell somebody something nice and see the delight in the person's eyes. On the other hand, if a child knows you are fibbing, see how your eyes shift and you become uncomfortable. This irrevocable connection is noticeable not merely in our daytime activities, but also when we dream. Though unconscious of the external world, the eyes move rapidly during dreams, and hence the dream state is labelled REM (Rapid Eye Movement). Thus it becomes clear that by controlling the mind, the senses, and the body too, can be controlled. But yoga recommends applying this controlling power to the body, then rising up to the optic nerves and to the brain, and finally to the mind.

### The Goal of Dhyana

Diligence destroys the two demons called *laya* and *vikshepa*. Seated in the classical posture maintained by 'thinking of the unlimited',<sup>14</sup> the yogi snaps the 'arc of reaction', implying that the arc of action—the sensory stimulus entering the brain—will fail to elicit a reaction in the form of cognition. The posture is still, relaxed, and yet full of controlled energy. To the onlooker, the yogi's eyeballs appear steady but with a blank look, gazing at the tip

of the nose. This will also mean that the eyes are bereft of nystagmus. The natural rhythms of respiration, circulation, metabolism, temperature, and other functions have astonishingly quietened. The yogi feels tranquil, alert, and very far removed from the body because he has withdrawn the senses 'like a tortoise withdrawing its limbs'.<sup>15</sup> As meditation intensifies, one feels as if one is entering into a vast inner space. It is like stepping out of a dank, dark dungeon into the bright world outside. As meditation becomes profounder, knowledge and bliss arise simultaneously. The yogi appears to the onlooker unmoving and devoid of life. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'By certain signs you can tell when meditation is being rightly practised. One of them is that a bird will sit on your head, thinking you are an inert thing.'<sup>16</sup> This inertness might seem ridiculous, repulsive or alarming but the *Katha Upanishad* assures us: 'When the five sensory organs of knowledge come to rest together with the mind, and the intellect, too, does not function, that state they call the highest.'<sup>17</sup> Consciousness, having withdrawn from everything, leaves just a trace of itself in some areas of the brain. The yogi has gone beyond the ken of human understanding. To let Swami Abhedananda take over as the onlooker and relate one of Sri Ramakrishna's periodic experience of this state:

One day the Master was in deep samadhi, seated on his bed like a wooden statue. He had no outer consciousness. Dr Mahendralal Sarkar checked his pulse and felt no throbbing. He then put his stethoscope on the Master's heart and did not get a heartbeat. Next, Dr Sarkar touched the Master's eyeballs with his finger, but still the Master's outer consciousness did not return. The doctor was dumbfounded.<sup>18</sup>

Yoga of course does not need the services of a doctor to verify its experiences. But broadly speaking, a doctor will be even more dumbfounded than was Dr Sarkar when, on the reactivation of the vital signs in the body, it will be seen that the intense subjective experience has transformed everything. The yogi has now become a knower of Atman, a sage, a blessing to humanity. This is the goal of dhyana. ~

## References

1. Bhagavadgita, 6.13.
2. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 2.8.
3. See Madhusudana Saraswati's commentary on Gita, 6.13.
4. *Yoga Sutras*, 1.10.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.192.
6. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.5.3.
7. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 745.
8. CW, 1.166.
9. *Brahma Sutras*, 4.1.9.
10. Swami Vidyaranya, *Jivan-mukti-viveka*, trans. Swami Mokshadananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1996), 168.
11. *Yoga Sutras*, 1.29.
12. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, 2.31-2.
13. *Gospel*, 604.
14. *Yoga Sutras*, 2.47.
15. *Gita*, 2.58.
16. *Gospel*, 604.
17. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.3.10.
18. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 449-50.

लये संबोधयेच्चित्तं विक्षिप्तं शमयेत्तु नः ।  
सकषायं विजानीयात्समप्राप्तं न चालयेत् ॥

If the mind falls asleep, arouse it (from *laya*); if distracted, restore it to tranquillity. Understand the nature of the mind when it is tinged with desire (though latent); and when the mind has attained equipoise, do not disturb it again.

—*Mandukya Karika*, 3.44

# Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Attainment of purification of mind through *karma* (selfless action) (continued)

... हंसेतिवर्णद्वयेनान्तःशिखोपवीतित्वं निश्चित्य, ब्राह्मणत्वं ब्रह्मध्यानाहृत्य, यतित्वमलक्षितान्तःशिखोपवीतित्वम्, एवं बहिर्लक्षितकर्मशिखाज्ञानोपवीतं गृहस्थस्य, आभासब्राह्मणत्वस्य केशसमूहशिखाप्रत्यक्षकार्पासतन्तुकृतोपवीतित्वम् । चतुःचतुर्गुणीकृत्य चतुर्विंशतितत्त्वापादनतन्तुकृत्यम्, नवतत्त्वमेकमेव परं ब्रह्म, तत्प्रतिसरयोग्यत्वाद्बहुमार्गवृत्तिं कल्पयन्ति । सर्वेषां ब्रह्मादीनां देवर्षीणां मनुष्याणां मुक्तिरेका ब्रह्मैकमेव ब्राह्मणत्वमेकमेव । वर्णाश्रमाचारविशेषाः पृथक्पृथक्, शिखा वर्णाश्रमिणामेकमेव, अपवर्गस्य यतेः शिखायज्ञोपवीतमूलं प्रणवमेकमेव वदन्ति । हंसः शिखा, प्रणवमुपवीतम्, नादः संधानम् । एष धर्मा नेतरो धर्मः । तत्कथमिति । प्रणवो हंसो नादस्त्रिवृतसूत्रं स्वहृदिचैतन्ये तिष्ठति । त्रिविधं ब्रह्म तद्विद्धि । प्रापञ्चिक शिखोपवीतं त्यजेत् ॥५॥

5. ... with the letters of [the word] *hamṣa* one should [determine, that is,] attain a conviction about the nature of the inner tuft and sacred thread;<sup>1</sup> *brāhmaṇa*-hood is [the attainment of] 'deservingness' [or worthiness] to meditate on Brahman; monkhood is the state of invisibility of [the external] tuft and sacred thread;<sup>2</sup> thus for a householder [there is] the externally visible tuft for [the sake of performance of] rituals and the sacred thread for acquiring knowledge; for one who has merely a semblance [or appearance] of *brāhmaṇa*-hood, there is the tuft consisting of a mass of hair [on the head] and the sacred thread made up of cotton yarn, both of which are outwardly visible.<sup>3</sup> [Although the *brahmasūtra* is one and one alone,] it is rendered into four [as *viśva*, *virāj*, *otr* and *turiya*] by quadruplication; the twenty-four *tattvas* constitute its threads, the nine *tattvas*<sup>4</sup> comprise the One Supreme Brahman; [but] since it is capable of being conceived of [or imagined in diverse ways in accordance with the compulsions of one's own intellect, people] envisage so many paths [depending on the various mental] proclivities (inclinations) [as means to attain It]. Liberation (*mukti*) is one [and the same] to all—to [gods like] Brahman, to divine sages, [and] to human beings; Brahman is One alone; *brāhmaṇa*-hood is one alone.<sup>5</sup> Castes (*varṇas*), stages of life (*āśramas*), [and] special observances are different—[all] different from one another; the tuft of hair on the head is one [and the same] for [all] castes and stages. For the monk (ascetic) [devoted to the pursuit] of liberation, the root (basis, foundation) of the tuft of hair and the sacred thread is the *praṇava* (the sacred *mantra* 'om') alone, [so] say [the wise]. The *hamṣa* is the tuft, the *praṇava* is the sacred thread and the *nāda* is the conjoining link. This is *dharma*; there is no other *dharma* [besides this]. How that is so [is being explained]. [These three—] *praṇava*, *hamṣa*, and *nāda* [constitute] the tripartite *sūtra* (string or thread),<sup>6</sup> residing in Consciousness (Awareness, or *caitanya*) [that is identical with] one's [own] Heart.<sup>7</sup> Know that to be the three-fold Brahman.<sup>8</sup> [The ascetic monk] shall discard (renounce) the worldly tuft and sacred thread.

(To be continued)

## Notes

1. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin comments here that *hamṣa* is related to *so'ham bhāvanā* (the intuitive feeling of 'I am He'—the identity of *jīva* and Brahman), *so'ham* being obtained by reversing *hamṣa*. Thus, repetition of *hamṣa* several times would automatically result in *so'ham*. 'So'ham *hamṣaḥ*' and '*hamṣaḥ so'ham*' are *mantras* whose mental repetition reminds the spiritual aspirant of his true nature as the Infinite Self or Atman/Brahman. *Sannyāsins*, in particular, constantly repeat *mantras* such as these, which

lead to non-dual awareness. For *sannyāsins*, who renounce the external tuft (*śikhā*) and sacred thread (*yajñasūtra*), the constant and continuous absorption in the *bhāvanā*, or divine mood, generated by the repetition of 'haṁsaḥ so'ham' and 'so'ham haṁsaḥ' constitutes the internal tuft and sacred thread (*brahmasūtra*).

2. A beautiful definition of *brāhmaṇa*-hood is found here. The Upaniṣad categorically states that *brāhmaṇatva* is *brahma-dhyāna-arhatvam*, that is, any aspirant who is a seeker of liberation will be eligible to be called a *brāhmaṇa*, provided he acquires the capacity and worthiness to meditate upon Brahman and pursue It as the *one* supreme goal of life. Also, monkhood (*yatitva*) is interpreted as the absence of *all* external signs (like the external tuft and sacred thread), the inner transformation of a monk leading him to a state in which all externalities are rendered redundant and without any significance.
3. In the case of such a person, with no inner transformation, *brāhmaṇa*-hood—the wearing of external signs like tuft and sacred thread—is just a mockery; he wears these signs as a mere signboard.
4. Perhaps meaning the *nava-brahman*, already referred to.
5. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary: On account of the attributelessness (*nirviśeṣatva*) of Brahman at the beginning and at the end, It is attributeless even in the middle, and therefore one; for the *smṛti* text says: 'Yannādaḥ yacca nāstyante tanmadhye bhātamapyasat.' Also, a wonderful definition of *brāhmaṇa*-hood, which is universal in nature and rational in content, is provided here by Upaniṣad Brahmayogin: '*Brahma-niṣṭha-prabhava brāhmaṇatvam ekameva*', that is, *brāhmaṇa*-hood is born of one-pointed devotion to Brahman, and hence is one alone.
6. *Praṇava* is the *turiya-oṅkāra* and its real import. The meaning of the *mantra* '*turyātitaṁ brahma haṁsaḥ*' also establishes the identity of the inner Self with the Supreme Self. *Paramātmān*, although the receptacle of *nāda-laya* (sound cadence), is Itself the triad of *praṇava*, *haṁsa* and *nāda*, and this triad is spoken of as the tripartite *sūtra* (*trivṛt-sūtra*). The reference to *nāda* and *laya* in this context requires greater clarification, which is not provided by the commentator.
7. In answer to the query 'Where is the seat of the above triad of *praṇava-haṁsa-nāda* that is identified with the *trivṛt-sūtra*?' the Upaniṣad says that it is in Consciousness, which is identical with one's own Heart. The meaning is that It remains by Itself shining in Its own glory ('*sve mahimni svayaṁ tiṣṭati*').
8. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin comments that the Brahman spoken of here is to be known as the twofold division of *para-brahman* and *apara-brahman*. This is the well-known hierarchy in Vedānta—*para-brahman* is supreme, attributeless (*nirviśeṣa*) and qualityless (*nirguṇa*), while *apara-brahman* is endowed with attributes (*saviśeṣa*) and qualities (*saguṇa*). *Apara-brahman* is also called *hiraṇyagarbha*, often identified with *īśvara*.

## Types of Upasana

To meet the needs of three different mental types, three kinds of upasana have been developed: *pratikopasana* (meditation on visual images), *namopasana* (meditation on sound symbols) and *ahamgrahopasana* (meditation on the self). Each aspirant should know which type of mind his is: form-oriented, name-oriented or self-oriented. ... Vedic *pratikopasana* was of two types: *sampad* and *adhyasa*. In *sampad upasana* an inferior object is used as a symbol to represent superior Reality. The symbol is unimportant, the attributes of the higher Reality dominate the meditative field. In *adhyasa upasana* the symbol chosen is itself a superior object and dominates the meditative field. Upon this symbol the attributes of the Reality are superimposed, but the symbol is as important as the attributes.

—Types of Meditation II, *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1981

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# Glimpses of Holy Lives

Sadhu Mathuradas

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

## **‘Let Everybody Become Like Me’**

**I**t was winter in Hardwar. Icy winds swept down from the mountains and the town reeled under the biting cold. To make matters worse, it rained every now and then until it all became quite unbearable. Mahendranath and the Sevashrama workers were worried about Mathuradasji. It had been quite a few days since the sadhu had come to the Sevashrama. That was something unusual for a regular visitor.

Some more days passed before Mathuradasji turned up again. The reason for his long absence was this: A Ramavat sadhu had recently arrived at Satikund. He was a run-of-the-mill wandering mendicant, except that he was burdened with too many belongings—which included a tambourine and a pair of cymbals, both of which he put to good use! And was he garrulous! If he stopped singing, he would start talking, and when he was doing neither, he would be snoring heavily! In fact he had all but taken over poor Mathuradasji’s hut. ‘I just could not put up with all that noise, so I ran away from Satikund,’ Mathuradasji said simply.

More than his guileless innocence, Mahendranath was struck by Mathuradasji’s uncomplaining acceptance of such a difficult and unpleasant situation. Mathuradasji could very well have ordered the insensitive sadhu to clear out; he had lived in that hut for so many years after all. Yet, rather than inconvenience a guest, though uninvited, he had himself moved out. And it had taken him no time to forget his hut.

‘So where are you staying now?’ probed Mahendranath. ‘In Bilwakeswar.’ ‘What!’ cried Mahendranath in disbelief. ‘You have started

living in Bilwakeswar?’ The forbidding forest lay far outside Hardwar town. No wonder Mathuradasji was unable to come to the Sevashrama as usual. ‘You mean you spend the nights in Bilwakeswar?’ asked Mahendranath once again, doubting if he had heard right. ‘Yes,’ replied Mathuradasji, ‘there is a large, smooth slab of rock on which I can sleep comfortably.’ ‘But how can you possibly sleep on cold stone out in the open—in this weather? It was pouring all through last night.’ ‘So what if it rained?’ Mathuradasji said. ‘It was enjoyable, most enjoyable; I was delighted.’ Mahendranath’s jaw dropped; he did not know what to say. There he was, wrapped in a quilted blanket, drinking hot tea sitting by the fireside, and still feeling cold. Mathuradasji was thirty years older.

Mahendranath continued: ‘But Bilwakeswar forest must be a treacherous place. They say tigers and elephants roam about even during the day. Are you not afraid of them?’ Mathuradasji did not know what fear was. ‘Why should I be afraid?’ he said, looking puzzled. ‘There is no reason why they should hurt me when I don’t hurt them.’

This was an object lesson to Mahendranath. All enmities cease in the presence of a yogi who is established in ahimsa, so say the scriptures. Mahendranath had also heard the sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna say: ‘We see the world as we are. What we have inside, we see outside.’

The examples of saints like Mathuradasji indeed hold great lessons for us. The Great War was then raging in Europe. Mathuradasji was at the Sevashrama listening to the monks discussing the war’s monstrosities. ‘How many people are dying, how many women are los-

ing their husbands and sons, how many children are becoming orphans! When will this ever end?' Swami Atulanandaji sadly observed. 'Well, Mathuradasji, what do you say?' 'There is a solution,' Mathuradasji said quietly. '*Let everybody become like me.* Until people give up hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, wars are bound to happen.'

### 'Please Don't Disturb'

Facing death is no laughing matter. None but the person who has completely conquered the body-idea can face death with equanimity. A sadhu once told Mahendranath how Mathuradasji had actually laughed in the face of death. The story itself was funny, but it left no doubt in Mahendranath's mind that Mathuradasji was a jivanmukta.

One night Mathuradasji was sleeping under a tree in a farm when some robbers scaled the fence and came in. They had planned to rob the farmhouse and were armed with staves and spears. Before setting about their business, however, they wanted to make sure that everything was all right. As they surveyed the area silently, their eyes fell on a sleeping figure under a tree. In the pale moonlight it was difficult to make out who it was. Seasoned criminals that they were, they approached the sleeping person cautiously, arms at the ready. Giving him a quick look, they concluded that it was the nightwatchman and decided to kill him without more ado.

The leader of the robbers gripped his spear and aimed it at the heart of the sleeping man. But their whispers had broken Mathuradasji's sleep. He had heard—and was seeing—everything, but did not care to save his own life! Just when the robber was about to strike, he cleared his throat and turned on his side. The robbers froze! The voice sounded familiar. 'Who is it?' the leader gasped in horror. 'Nanga Baba?' 'Ha! Ha! Who else?' Mathuradasji laughed out loud. 'But ... Babaji, do you realize how close you had come to losing your life?' remonstrated the robber. 'Never mind

my life, why can't you people let a man sleep?' retorted Mathuradasji. 'Go away, don't disturb me now, please.'

Their plans ruined, the confused robbers melted away into the darkness, and Mathuradasji went back to sleep.

### 'So I Got Rid of It'

One hot summer morning Mathuradasji appeared at the Sevashrama—stark naked! It was about eleven o'clock. He found himself an easy chair and settled down with a hookah. 'What is the matter, Mathuradasji? Where is your *kaupina*?' people asked him. 'I could not help it,' said Mathuradasji in a somewhat irritated tone of voice. 'Help what?' they persisted. 'Losing my *kaupina*. I was walking down the road when all of a sudden a group of Punjabi women blocked my way. They wanted to make pranams and take the dust of my feet. I don't like these things, but today I was completely trapped. I tried to elbow my way out, but somebody—a man, mercifully, because there were one or two men in the group—caught hold of my *kaupina* from behind in order to stop me. What else could I do? I got rid of the *kaupina* and ran away, and they were left holding the rag.'

Mathuradasji narrated his adventure like a boy of seven or eight. People had a hearty laugh over the story but were also amazed at the sadhu's simplicity. Nischayanandaji wanted to make him a *kaupina* from a new length of cloth. 'See that it is not more than three inches wide,' Mathuradasji told him. Nischayanandaji made the *kaupina* as told and himself tied it round Mathuradasji's waist.

Mahendranath had once seen with his own eyes how much Mathuradasji loathed honour and veneration. On that occasion Mathuradasji, in order to avoid a crowd of enthusiastic devotees, had vaulted over a crumbling wall knowing very well that the ground on the other side was bristling with thorny bushes!

(To be concluded)

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 Reviews 

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.

**Rāmacaritamānasa in South Africa.** *Usha Devi Shukla*. Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: *mlbd@vsnl.com*. 2002. xxiv + 228 pp. Rs 325.

There is a scene in Kamban's Tamil Ramayana where Hanuman reveals himself to Sita in the Ashoka grove. Sita's mind is in turmoil. A monkey speaking in human tongue and calling out, 'Rama, Rama!' Hadn't she been deceived by Ravana once before when he had come to her forest residence in an ascetic's garb? What if he has now come in this monkey form? But then, she tells herself:

Be he the rakshasa; or an immortal;/ Or one of the monkey race; or evil;/ Or good; he came here to tell/ My Lord's name and melt my thoughts/ Giving me a new lease of life; can there be/ A greater help than this?

How very true! Ever since Valmiki indited his epic, there have been thousands of versions in many languages and countries, and each retelling is nectarean to the aspirant heart. From the tenth century onwards, Indian dialects became major languages by translating or transcreating Valmiki's epic. According to Sri Aurobindo, only two of these epic creations can be termed supreme masterpieces: the versions of Kamban and Tulsidas. Of the latter, *Rāmacaritamānasa*, he says that it combines 'with a singular mastery, lyric intensity, romantic richness and the sublimity of the epic imagination, and is at once a story of the divine avatara and a long chant of religious devotion'.

When Vedic Hinduism was at a low ebb during Islamic rule in North India, the bhakti movement initiated by the Alvars of South India in the third century came to the rescue of Sanatana Dharma. If the sixteenth century was a dark period for the native religion, in this very darkness rose the sun of Tulsidas. Coming in the spiritual line of Ramanuja's disciple Ramananda, Tulsidas wrote his epic in Avadhi, the dialect of the common man. The effect on the populace was electric. To this day, the *Rāmacari-*

*tamānasa* has remained everyone's favourite in the Hindi-speaking belt.

From 1860 onwards, a large number of poor people from this area went over to South Africa as indentured labourers to work in the sugarcane plantations. Living conditions were harsh, and the alien atmosphere was depressing. Yet the Indians worked hard and stabilized the sugar industry in its early stages thanks to their agrarian background. What sustained them was, perhaps, the *Rāmacaritamānasa*. The majority of the immigrants were Hindus and whether they could read or not they learnt to revere the book ('the *Rāmacaritamānasa* contains everything that one needs, but most importantly Sri Rama, the Supreme God permeates its pages and together with Him are found the many gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon'), and by listening to readings and expositions, these self-exiles in an alien clime gained a firm knowledge of the poem's contents. So the Tulsi version was handed down to future generations as a spiritual raft to hold on to, amidst the myriad problems that confronted the Indians in South Africa.

'The *Rāmacaritamānasa* fulfilled various needs of the early settlers. It was scripture and therefore a source of religious learning; the story, with its various sub-plots, when read or heard served as a pleasant diversion; it further served as a textbook for the study of Hindi and led hundreds of people from illiteracy to literacy; indeed it was like a multifaceted gem which represented India and reflected Indian life in its multiplicity and variety. Those who carried the *Rāmacaritamānasa* to South Africa brought along with them a part of India.' (113)

Usha Devi Shukla has collected information about the state of *Rāmacaritamānasa* studies, rituals, and satsang in Hindi-speaking families in South Africa today. It is moving to know how the knowledge of Hindi and religious faith were kept alive by the settlers and how they improved their literary skills and built temples for common worship, all the time keeping alive their faith through Tulsi's epic. These settlers also initiated Ramayana sabhas

where two or more people came together regularly to study and discuss the *Rāmacaritamānasa*. In effect it has been the sourcebook for guidance regarding festivals, family observances, and purificatory rituals.

Not that history has always been a successful, upward movement. Floods, as well as the step-motherly treatment meted out to settlers by the South African government, have played havoc with *Rāmacaritamānasa* studies. English education has weakened the knowledge of Hindi in the younger generations and hence there has been a widening of the gap between the scripture and the people. Western values, Christianity, the Group Areas Act which disrupted joint families, and the increasing preference for nuclear families have also played a strong part in weakening the hold of the epic on the popular psyche.

*Rāmacaritamānasa in South Africa* studies all these factors carefully and concludes with a study of the resurgence in Ramayana studies in South Africa thanks to institutions like Divine Life Society, Ramakrishna Math and the South African chapter of Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Ms Shukla's analysis of attitudes to the Ramayana characters recorded by her respondents is very interesting, for it shows that people have now begun to cogitate about the epic, instead of offering blind adherence. However, their faith in Tulsi is complete: 'The increasing appeal of the *Rāmacaritamānasa* in a world far removed from that of Tulsidas in space and time, can best be explained by Tulsidas's accurate prognostications about Kaliyuga and the increasing necessity for the panacea, *Rama Nama*. Thus the indications are that the *Rāmacaritamānasa* will gain yet further in popularity, particularly with the institutional support it has been receiving in the last decade.' (201-2)

The first half of the book deals with the history of the bhakti movement, the emergence of Tulsidas, the Islamic attack on Sanatana Dharma during the last one thousand years and more; and finally, the Babri Masjid imbroglio. Written with admiration and compassion for the attempts of Indian immigrants to safeguard the ageless religious and spiritual culture of India, *Rāmacaritamānasa in South Africa* is indeed a very important addition to Ramayana studies all over the world.

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Srirangam

**Sri Chaitanya and the Chaitanya Movement.** *Amarnath Chatterjee*. Associated Publishing Company, 8788 Rani Jhansi Road, PO Box No 2679, Karol Bagh, New Delhi 110 005. E-mail: [apc@apcbooks.com](mailto:apc@apcbooks.com). 2001. ix + 274 pp. Rs 495.

Chaitanyaism is an epoch-making event in the history of Bengal and it influenced the religious history of northern India in various ways. Though predominantly a religious movement, its influence on the life of Bengal was fairly widespread. It was instrumental in bringing about a renaissance in the cultural and social life of Bengal, and provided an unprecedented stimulus to literary creativity. It injected a new life and vitality into the moribund mentality of the people of Bengal who had lost their manliness and self-respect owing to oppressive subjugation. In the literary sphere, Chaitanya's life, activities, and teachings enkindled the creative imagination of poets and writers, both Vaishnava and non-Vaishnava. As a result, there was a phenomenal growth in literary activity. Bengal Vaishnavism stands out as a shining example of man's unceasing quest for God. It has shown the way to divinize human love.

To treat Chaitanyaism separately from Bengal Vaishnavism is to leave oneself open to the charge of *avyāpti*, non-inclusion of a part of the thing defined, a logical fallacy. Chaitanyaism is not only a spiritual movement but also a mighty social force released by one of the greatest humanists that India has produced. Chaitanya preached a new religion of love based on intense devotion, purity and simplicity, and also love for mankind. In modern society, which is being increasingly deprived of love owing to the dehumanizing effects of rationalism and gross materialism, Chaitanya's all-embracing gospel of love is an imperative need.

Vaishnavism, as we understand it today, was first developed into a coherent system by Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE), who synthesized together the luminous thoughts and insights of past saints and savants and established them on the sound foundation of Vedantic metaphysics. Nimbarka and Madhva are important Vaishnava savants who flourished in South India from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Vallabha, a Telugu brahmin of the fifteenth century, exalted the worship of Radha-Krishna which came to be recognized as a characteristic feature of Bengal Vaishnavism in later

years. The Radha-Krishna cult and the path of devotional love, which are the marks of neo-Vaishnavism (known as Bengal or Gaudiya Vaishnavism) activated by Chaitanya, found expression in and through the poetical compositions of a galaxy of poets in Bengal, of whom special mention must be made of Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Chandidas.

The book entitled *Sri Chaitanya and the Chaitanya Movement*, written by Amarnath Chatterjee, an erudite scholar on Vaishnavism, gives us a picture of the Chaitanya movement of Bengal, particularly in the light of Chaitanya. Explaining the background of the Chaitanya movement of Bengal, Sri Chatterjee has given us an intimate and in-depth study of the life and mission of Chaitanya which is absolutely necessary for understanding the philosophy of the Krishna-bhakti movement.

While discussing Chaitanya's gospel in the fourth chapter of the book, the author has pointed out that Chaitanya is best understood when interpreted in the light of Radha's emotion (*rādhābhāva*). Philosophically and metaphysically she is *hlāḍīnī* embodied, the single and sole repository of *mahābhāva* (the highest emotion of love mounting to the point of saturation). Bhakti is regarded as the best of ways and means for the attainment of the highest bliss. While action and knowledge are dependent on devotion, devotion itself is independent. Now, what is bhakti? It is supreme attachment to God. It is the most disinterested and concentrated dedication of the senses to the service of the Lord of the senses.

There have been various approaches to the conception: poetic, humanistic, philosophic, mystic, symbolic, and so on. But the poetic-humanistic interpreters would have us believe that the conception of Radha, originally human and secular, has been sublimated into the divine. According to this view, she represents the yearning of a woman in self-forgetting love for a man, and out-of-the-way love, defying accepted notions of sexual morality, created the Radha myth. In fact, it was Rabindranath Tagore who set the ball rolling and sponsored the idea of the secularity of Radha. In his famous poem 'Vaishnava Kavita' in *Sonar Tari*, he poses the question: '*Satyā kare kaho more he vaishnava kavi/ Kotha tumi peyechile ei prema-chavi/ ... Radhikar chitta dīrna kari tīvra vyakulata/ Churi kare layecho kar mukh, kar ankhi hote*; Tell me, in truth, O Vaishnava poet, where did you get this image of love? ... This great yearning piercing Radha's heart, from whose lips

and eyes did you steal?'

In Chapters 5 and 6 of the book Sri Chatterjee has discussed in detail the influence of the Chaitanya movement on society and literature. A hurried glance at the economic history of medieval Bengal gives us an idea as to how Vaishnavism was accepted and espoused by a large number of people belonging to the artisan classes, which also included weavers. Their enthusiasm in accepting Vaishnavism was prompted by an assurance of social dignity, which was denied to them by the then orthodox society. So the liberalism of Chaitanya and his creed suited their need perfectly. Even the landless peasantry of Bengal was attracted by the mass appeal of Vaishnavism with its liberal traditions and belief in unorthodox values. Chaitanya's ideal of love as the basic moral virtue had a tremendous impact on non-Vaishnavas too.

Chaitanya and other Vaishnava leaders did a great service by upholding the cause of women and improving their position in society. As against orthodox traditions, there was no bar against initiation of women in the Gaudiya sect. The author has rightly pointed out that the influence of Chaitanya's Vaishnavism made a great impact on two of Bengal's neighbouring provinces, Orissa and Assam.

One of the remarkable features of Chaitanya's inspiration is evidenced in the vast literature produced by his followers, both in the ancient classical language and in the spoken vernaculars of the people: Bengali, Oriya, and Hindi. Among the biographical works *Sri Krishna Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, and *Chaitanya Charitamrita* are worth mentioning. Bengali literature has been greatly enriched by Vaishnava *padāvali*. So Chaitanya is no myth. His achievements constitute history, having gone into the very texture of Bengal's culture and the fine susceptibilities of the Bengali nature. We in Bengal are proud of our poetry and music. These two priceless assets are our heritage, for which we are indebted to two personalities, the ascetic Chaitanya and the internationally acclaimed Tagore.

At a moment of disturbed serenity over the happenings in the contemporary strife-torn world, Tagore gave vent to the agonizing writhings of his soul: 'Lord, you have sent your messengers to this merciless world time and again; they said, forgive all, love all, and destroy the poison of hatred within.' Who would answer better to Tagore's description of God's messengers than the man of love

from Nadia? The people who rallied round this wonderful man belonged to all ranks and strata of society, which included the Muslim rulers of the country and the sons of the soil whom they ruled; the scholar and the dialectician; the purse-proud aristocrat and the impecunious commoner; the virtuous and the most sinful among men; and the ignorant masses. So the sincere and soulful outburst of popular approbation reached the sky from the core of the devotees' hearts in these solemn, sonorous words of salutation: 'Worship Gauranga and repeat his name/ He who worships him is alone dear to me.'

Last but not least, the merit of Prof Chatterjee's book has been greatly heightened by the inclusion of a number of appendices, where he has discussed the ethics of Chaitanya's movement, his message to contemporary society, and the genesis of the movement for Krishna-consciousness. A rich bibliography is an additional attraction. The book is an asset for research-minded teachers and students.

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**Spiritual Education.** *Purnima Zweers*. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowalia, Varanasi 221 001. E-mail: [indicabooks@satyam.net.in](mailto:indicabooks@satyam.net.in). 2002. 224 pp. Rs 225.

Education, in modern times, is usually classified into two groups: secular and spiritual. In ancient times in India, there was no such artificial division, since all knowledge was considered sacred and spiritual. It is only since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when English was introduced as a medium of instruction, that this artificial cleavage occurred in the field of education.

In spite of this, traditional values were respected and taught in family circles, even though schools and colleges confined themselves to secular education. This was the state of affairs till 1947. After independence, successive commissions on education made many alterations in the education system. Very gradually, even the bit of spiritual education taught in schools in the form of moral science was removed from the curriculum.

It is in this context that the book under review assumes significance. The author is a social worker and a teacher from Holland who has worked for several years in India and has come into contact

with several spiritual masters. This book is the outcome of her concern over falling standards of the Indian way of life and the erosion in the value system.

The book commences with a brief introduction to the subject matter and the importance of spiritual values in human life. The second chapter compares spiritual education with ordinary education. The author quotes at this stage several great personalities of India who have either contributed to the education system or have inspired teachers. The personalities quoted are Swami Shivananda, J Krishnamurti and Rabindranath Tagore.

The third chapter introduces the concept of yoga. But the core of the book is the fourth chapter, which gives in detail the experience of the author herself in the field of spiritual education. The fifth chapter is about two schools, one in the United States (Yogaville Vidyalayam in Virginia) and the other in Holland (Plato School in Amsterdam), which have introduced a spiritual component into their education system. The last chapter, of greater interest to Indian readers, is about Amrita Vidyalayam run by the Mata Amritanandamayi movement in Kerala, the Vedapathashala of Sri Ramanasramam in Tamil Nadu, the Kanyapeeth of Ma Anandamayee Trust in Varanasi, the Alice Project, run by two Italians, in Sarnath, and Anandashram of Swami Ramdas in Kerala. The last mentioned is not a regular school, but has inspired a large number of people in introducing a spiritual content in school curriculum.

Perhaps, the most appealing part of the book is the collection of a large number of letters written by children to God, printed in facsimile. Some of the thoughts expressed by the children are simply captivating, showing how close children can feel to God if only they are introduced to spiritual education at a young age.

The author writes with total commitment and is thoroughly convinced of the values of spiritual education in the life of a child. No person in the proper frame of mind would disagree with her. She must be congratulated on producing this short but profound book, which should be read by all interested in the spiritual growth of the future citizens of the world.

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# Reports

## **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations**

The following centres celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Holy Mother (*main programmes are given in parentheses*):

**Agartala** (3 spiritual retreats and a seminar), **Along** (painting and essay competitions), **Asansol** (speeches, songs, and recitations), **Baranagar Mission** (public meetings, a devotees' convention addressed by Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and cultural programmes), **Chandigarh** (a public meeting addressed by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, speeches at various places in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, an exhibition at Solan, Himachal Pradesh, and devotional songs by blind children), **Chandipur** (cultural competitions, a public meeting, a devotees' convention, a cultural programme, and an exhibition), **Cooch Behar** (a devotees' convention and an exhibition), **Delhi** (Jagaddhatri Puja), **Gol Park** (a symposium and panel discussion, cultural programmes, and a devotees' convention), **Itanagar** (a public meeting presided over by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and a cultural programme), **Kankhal** (a procession, public meetings, Jagaddhatri Puja, a cultural programme, a film show, and an exhibition), **Kankurgachhi** (cultural competitions, a procession, release of an audio cassette and CD by Sri Shyamal Datta, Governor of Nagaland, and a public meeting addressed by Swami Gahananandaji, Sri Shyamal Datta, and others), **Kanpur** (a public meeting presided over by Swami Gahananandaji and release of a souvenir by him), **Lucknow** (a public meeting addressed by Swami Gahananandaji), **Narendrapur** (a pro-

cession, public meetings at various places in 7 districts of West Bengal, exhibitions, cultural programmes, and release of a booklet), **Narotam Nagar** (lectures and group discussions, bhajans, distribution of clothes, and starting of a coaching centre and a weaving centre), **Purulia** (speeches, a cultural programme, an exhibition, and release of a booklet), **Rahara** (cultural competitions, public meetings addressed by Swami Smarananandaji and others, a drama, and distribution of about 1,00,000 booklets on Holy Mother among students of 70 schools), **Rajkot** (spiritual retreats and cultural programmes), **Sarisha** (a devotees' convention and release of a souvenir), and **Chittagong, Bangladesh** (a procession, a public meeting, and a cultural programme)

## **News from Branch Centres**

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for a new OPD building at **Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar**, on 26 November. The centre celebrated its silver jubilee from 1 to 3 December. Sri Gegong Apang, Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, unveiled a bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda in front of the hospital on 1 December. Swami Atmasthanandaji presided over the public meeting held on this occasion. Sri C C Singpho, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, released a souvenir. Cultural programmes and a photo exhibition on the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in Arunachal Pradesh formed a part of the 3-day function.

On 15 December, Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated 'Bisra Awas', a colony of 39 houses for the primitive tribal families of Basukocha village

in Ranchi district built by **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi**.

**Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore**, celebrated its centenary from 25 to 28 December. A public meeting, two seminars, and release of a souvenir formed a part of the 3-day function.

A class X student of the school run by **Ramakrishna Mission, Along**, stood first in the state-level essay competition on 'Need for Energy Conservation' conducted by the Department of Power, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

### Relief and Rehabilitation Work (December 2004)

#### Fire Relief

Centre	State/Country	Items Distributed	Number of Beneficiaries
Shillong	Meghalaya	Khichuri and 68 blankets	27 families
Puri (Mission)	Orissa	233 kg rice, 50 kg dal, 250 kg potatoes, 76 kg brinjals, 124 cauliflowers, 53 saris, 53 blankets, 53 towels	53 families
Chittagong	Bangladesh	300 kg rice, 55 kg potatoes, 5 lt oil, 33 saris, 11 dhotis, 44 chadars, 11 buckets	33 families

#### Distress Relief

Centre	State/Country	Items Distributed
Along	Arunachal Pradesh	900 sweaters, 200 blankets
Baranagar (Mission)	West Bengal	400 dhotis, 400 saris, 150 blankets
Ramharipur	West Bengal	400 dhotis, 1100 saris, 150 sets of children's garments
Chittagong	Bangladesh	1100 blankets

#### Flood Relief

Centre(s)	Area of Operation	Items Distributed
Guwahati, Karimganj, Silchar	Morigaon, Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Nalbari	1250 dhotis, 2350 saris, 116 chadars, 151 assorted garments, 1905 blankets
Patna	Samastipur, Darbhanga, Madhuvani	3858 dhotis, 12,296 saris, 5000 blankets
Sargachhi, Belgharia	Murshidabad, North 24-Parganas	1848 kg <i>chira</i> , 437 kg sugar, 6031 dhotis, 6000 saris, 150 packages of assorted garments, 40 quilts, 11,960 blankets, 1,25,000 halazone tablets

#### Cyclone Rehabilitation

A colony of 29 houses for cyclone victims under a 'Build Your Own House' scheme with the help of building materials supplied by **Ramakrishna Math, Cooch Behar**, was inaugurated on 26 December.

## A Brief Report of Ramakrishna Mission Tsunami Relief Work as of 1 February 2005

Beginning from the day the killer tsunami struck coastal India and Sri Lanka, Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres have till date served through scores of relief camps tens of thousands of victims with food, clothing, temporary housing and medical aid. Given below are some important highlights of the relief operations.



*The devastation in Nagapattinam*

### *Ramakrishna Math, Chennai*

Relief work started when hundreds of stricken people from nearby coastal colonies thronged the centre on the morning of 26 December 2004. They were served cooked food and arrangements were made to accommodate them in marriage halls. Immediately after, monks and volunteers of the Math visited the affected areas of the city and, later, with the help of a host of unaffiliated centres of the Order, initiated primary relief work in Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Kanyakumari, Kanchipuram and Villipuram districts. The worst-hit among them was Nagapattinam, a town with a thriving marine business. Relief was given to 5000 families there. The centre plans to address the economic need of the locals by providing them with 240 mechanized boats. In Cuddalore, 9 acres of land were bought in order to build houses for over 100 families, whose huts were washed out of a nearby island; the families will also be given 54 boats and

fishing nets. In Kanyakumari, the Math joined hands with Vivekananda Ashrama, Vellimalai, and distributed relief materials across 58 villages. Plans have been drawn up to rehabilitate 15 villages near Kalpakkam, Chengalpattu. In addition to providing primary relief in Chennai city and its suburbs, during which 90 tonnes of rice and dal were distributed, the centre also operated a well-equipped mobile medical unit treating thousands of patients.

Steps are being taken to counsel the traumatized, provide educational aids to students, continue medical services, and organize programmes of a confidence-building nature.

The centre has so far spent over Rs 1 crore and distributed, through 43 relief camps, 106 tonnes of foodstuffs, 12,225 grocery packages, 1,04,050 items of clothing and 17,950 sets of utensils, benefiting more than 76,600 people.

### *Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair*

In spite of being itself badly hit, Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair, took charge of a relief camp set up at a government school in Hadoo, where Nicobari tribals had taken shelter. Here it served cooked food to the victims three times a day. Soon it extended its work to 44 more relief camps in and around Port Blair, distributing, apart from food and clothing, ar-



*Andaman tribals at a temporary shelter*



*With the afflicted in Andaman*

ticles of daily use like blankets and bed sheets, candles and lanterns, mosquito nets and insect repellants, and toiletries and disinfectants. It also prepared food packets for airdrop over the most unreachable islands. Besides the above camps, the centre worked at Hut Bay in Little Andaman, 8 hours by sea from Port Blair, where a 12 sq km area of land had been washed away by the waves. It also distributed essential relief materials at Neil Island.

The centre's efforts benefited 40,500 people in all: 37,800 kilos of foodstuffs, 4170 grocery packages, 41,830 garments and 2215 sets of utensils were distributed through 47 camps.

#### *Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo*

Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo, and its Batticaloa sub-centre commenced relief work immediately after the disaster struck. The former set up 4 camps, where people were given dry rations along with arrangements for cooking, while the latter, through its 57 camps, dis-



*Distributing foodstuffs at a Batticaloa camp*

tributed a large number of packages of cooked food. Both centres also distributed a huge quantity of essential commodities, including medicines.

In all, 28,745 kilos of foodstuffs, 35,978 grocery packages, 11,555 items of clothing and 2552 sets of utensils were distributed by the 61 camps, benefiting nearly 81,800 people.

### **An Appeal**

**A**fter conducting extensive primary relief work in tsunami-affected areas in India and Sri Lanka, the next phase in Ramakrishna Mission's service is REHABILITATION of the affected people. A survey of their requirements is in progress. Steps are being taken to provide new boats (catamarans), fishing nets, and shelters to the fisherfolk—the main sufferers in the worst-affected areas. Efforts are also being made to rehabilitate children orphaned by the disaster in Andaman Islands.

The Rehabilitation work will be extended further, depending upon the availability of funds. The total cost is likely to exceed Rs 10 crore.

For detailed reports of Tsunami Relief and for information regarding the mode of sending donations, please visit [www.sri-ramakrishna.org/tsunami](http://www.sri-ramakrishna.org/tsunami) and [www.sri-ramakrishnamath.org](http://www.sri-ramakrishnamath.org).

All donations paid in cash or by cheque/draft drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Math' and 'Ramakrishna Mission' are exempt from income tax under section 80-G of the Income Tax Act.

Donations may please be sent to:

- (1) The General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission (Headquarters), PO Belur Math, Dist Howrah, West Bengal 711 202 (Fax: 91-33-26544346; E-mail: [rkmhq@vsnl.com](mailto:rkmhq@vsnl.com)) or
- (2) The President, Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004, Tamil Nadu (Fax: 91-44-24934589; E-mail: [srk-math@vsnl.com](mailto:srk-math@vsnl.com)).